

HANDBOOK FOR HIGH SCHOOL TENNIS COACHES

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SECTION 1

FOREWARD

In 1972, I put away my baseball glove and discovered tennis. As a youngster I grew up on the farm catching, throwing, and hitting baseballs.

Also, football and basketball were played in the yard and basketball goals (like the one in *Hoosiers*) were used.

Tennis was great because every few seconds you could hit a ball. No more "grazing" in right field. It is a great sport for kids, teams and adults.

Even though my backyard "glory" never got me a college scholarship (played 1 year of baseball at Chowan College), I did develop a love for various sports which lead to a teaching/coaching career.

As a 1976 graduate of Western Carolina University, I majored in Health/Physical Education. I had teaching/coaching stints in Columbia, South America, Atlanta, Ga., as well as Orange High School in Hillsborough, NC, Chapel Hill High and East Chapel Hill High Schools in Chapel Hill, NC.

I felt fortunate to have a rewarding and challenging career. For 35 years, I coached football, basketball (boys and girls) volleyball and mostly tennis (boys and girls) during that time. I also taught 5-6 classes of physical education or health each day.

I began playing the game in the 1970's tennis boom.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

Before I started coaching tennis I had several advantages:

- 1) I could play (not great) but a solid 4.0 – 4.5 player at that time (age 27-28)
- 2) I have taken good coaching methods classes at WCU as a Phys. Ed. teaching major
- 3) I have coached football, basketball, gave some tennis lessons, and attended coaching clinics.

I have encountered many coaches in my years that have been thrust into a head tennis coaching job. The Athletic Director has no one on staff to coach so they may reach out to the community.

Or you may be a young teacher starting your career where the interview is going well for a social studies position. Then you get asked “do you have an interest in coaching”? *Pause!!!* “We really need someone to coach tennis!” *Pause!!!*

Knowing your next response should be “yes,” if you want the job, you say “sure sounds good.” This happens more than you can imagine. Many Athletic Directors (AD) are swamped with duties. And many pertain to the bigger revenue-generating sports.

I was fortunate to have coached in Hillsborough, NC at Orange High School for 10 years, Chapel Hill High School for 20 years, and at East Chapel Hill High School for 10 years. The ADs I worked for valued all sports and were VERY supportive of the tennis programs. They made my job easier and our sport important. That means a great deal to a coach.

I have met many coaches who started with little or no experience (teachers and coaches) from the community. I have proceeded to have success and build good programs that the players and parents can appreciate.

In this guide I will cover areas that may help you in Team Management. Also, in areas that can affect tennis situations and handle the “gray” areas that always arise during your tenure. I have learned a great deal from various college and mostly high school coaches and coaching clinics reaching across the state. I hope this information can help you in your journey.

ORGANIZING THE TEAM

- Have pre-season and try-out dates on the school website, usually 2 months prior to season's start.
- For the fall season, I post information on website by mid-February as families plan summers earlier now. I do not want vacation plans to conflict with opening practice.
- Have a bulletin board (perhaps in the gym) to post relevant tennis information.

Pre-Season

We do some pre-season volunteer practice as our courts are on the school campus (open to all but not yet required). A student playing a winter sport (basketball, swimming, etc., **should be allowed** to complete their season.

Usually 2-3 days per week. Conditioning, hitting, practice games, etc. This is **not** a try-out period.

NCHSAA lists the try-out dates for boys and girls.

At East Chapel Hill High school, we occasionally had 32-35 players to try-out. We had a Junior Varsity (JV) and Varsity team, and a head coach for each team, plus two court sites.

Try-Outs and Challenge Matches

- Our 1st day of practice we have organizing and explaining try-out procedures and expectations.
- With our numbers we can begin some challenge matches for team slots and ranking positions.
- We begin challenge matches on the 2nd or 3rd day of practice. Players know this through our information material.
- Not all teams can do this but by expecting this soon into try-outs, the players should have been playing practice matches on their own.
- Our format may vary sometime depending on weather and number of players we are working with. Initially, we play 4-6 game sets that may be no-AP if time is an issue.
- For ranking challenges 8 or 10 game pro sets (ad-scoring) is the norm. This helps us get an initial ladder. Once this ladder is formed, we may let 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, etc. in a 2-of 3 set match as time allows. We sometimes do 8 or 10 game pro sets here also.
- After about 2 weeks practice we dial down on the challenges. We need to team-build and focus on doubles practice.

Coaches' thoughts may vary on challenge matches. Parents and players (usually) want lower ranked players to challenge up. We will do a partial round-robin format with most players getting 4-5 short matches.

Then we go with a set line-up. Players need to play in their required numbered flight. You should cut off challenges as late season line-up changes can create team discord. Plus, your opponents may perceive this as stacking.

Like any high school team basketball, baseball, soccer, etc., a set line-up or rotation lets players understand their roles. Teams need to focus on their opponents and not on each other.

TEAM SIZE

Usually 12-14 players can make an ideal team size. Having 2-3 over or under this is manageable. It may take practice adjustments. Most buses are suited for 12 players.

No-Cut Teams

Some teams choose to have larger teams to avoid cutting or to build more players for a program. A great plan if it works for you! Consult with your AD.

Factors to Consider

- Adequate court space
- Assistant coach/coaches
- Possibly contact a program that has a No-Cut style team and consult with them.

Side Note: Players may come out for a team to enhance their transcripts for college. If a player stops attending practice or drops from the team, the coach or the AD should inform their school counselor. It should **not** be on the transcript. It is a good idea to let the players know this.

If or when one must make cuts, it is nice to have contact information for local teaching pros. I like to see players continue their tennis development and come out for the team the next year.

TEAM CAPTAIN GUIDELINES

Leadership by a team's captains (seniors and juniors) can make or break a team's success.

The following is a list of expectations and guidelines that leaders/captains should strive to demonstrate.

- 1) Be on time...**First there** and **Last to Leave!**
- 2) Learn all the player names and make a habit to acknowledge teammates daily.
- 3) Encourage effort by all. **Lead by Deeds.** In drills and running, captains should be at or near the front always!!!
- 4) Leading by example can be more effective than what one verbalizes. In practice when the coach says take them out, the captains should say "let's go" and then take the team through pre-practice rituals. Same on Game Days.

*Note on Captains (Selections) There are various methods. I usually prefer a junior or senior.

- 1) Straight election
- 2) Have Senior Leaders (no captains)
- 3) Coach selects. (I have done this my last 6-7 years (usually seniors who start and have put in more time in the off-season). I have had no issues with this. Plus, it prevents the election of the "popular player" who may not be that dedicated.

SECTION 2

GRIP GUIDE – (See attachments – Section 5)

YOUR LINE-UPS

Reference: Tennis Rules on NCHSAA website.

- 1) There can be various methods of challenge matches used to determine your starting line-up. Plus, a ranking of all team members.
- 2) There are always Nerves and Excitement at the start of the seasons with challenge matches.

Notes on this topic:

- Grades 9-12 should be allowed to challenge for starting spots.
- Returning players should earn their position each year. (*Nothing is promised.*)
- Challenge matches can be 8 or 10 games pro sets or 2 of 3 if time allows. No-ad scoring is an option.
- Long matches can be tricky with August heat over spring weather. Players may not be acclimated early in the season.
- I favor shorter sets 10 or 8 game pro sets. But players will play 4-5 to see what part of the line-up they fall in.
- If I have a dominate #1 or #2, then no reason for them to play 10, 11 or 12 players.
- This usually works by having small round-robin group play. A new player or freshmen should play through these groups.
- When the latter is formed, most players should feel they have a fair and reasonable chance.

Tennis Hitting Rules

Direct – Hard shots to their natural direction. “Volley” away from the source.

Return serve – Back toward server’s feet.

G. stroke – Back toward the hitter, usually cross court (**CC**). **Volley** to **Volley** exchange usually cross court.

Re-Direct – or “changing direction” - Slower paced shots. Spin helps. Serves, overheads, floating volleys and G. strokes with little pace. “Great tactic vs “pushers.” The run around forehand (**FH**) because you have time.

Neutral Balls - Usually a ground stroke that is ½ Direct and ½ Re-Direct. A good ball to move around the court while “Building the Point.”

Off Balance Balls – Shots that you are chasing and cannot set-up for. “Just get them back.” Ex: short balls, wide shots (to lob) or off-balance overheads. “Hustle Shots.” Defensive shot.

TENNIS BASICS

*When on or behind “baseline” – hit Rally balls to “Build the Point”

- Hit mostly crosscourt or down “Middle.”
- 10-12 ball rallies may be needed to get an **error** or a shorter ball to hit toward “a corner.”
- A **neutral** rally ball is a good ball to move “Side to Side.”
- Rarely try a “Drop Shot” from the baseline.
- “Keeping” your opponent “Behind” the baseline should keep you in control of the court.
- If your opponent has an obvious weakness. Play “to it.”
- In **Doubles** like Singles, the players who keep balls deep, and in the court will usually “win.”

BAD MATCH BEHAVIOR

I am happy to say I have not seen numerous cases of court outbursts in the past several years. High School players model what they see in professional ranks.

In the Pros, most loss of emotional control is usually followed with a loss and perhaps a fine. And if a player has an outburst, it makes worldwide news regardless of the hundreds of matches they have played without incidents.

Match ejections are rare (I have had about 3 in 30+ years). A good precaution is to stop or correct in practice. What your players do in practice will be reflected at match time.

You can caution a player if you see a minor infraction, i.e. a dropped racket on purpose, a ball slammed against the fence, etc. If this is not your player, notify his/her coach and give them the first priority to address this.

If you are at home you can take a stronger stance since these are your home courts (ex: profanity is not allowed at your school, tennis courts are school or district property.)

A COACH'S "NIGHTMARE"

A team with bad actors (sportsmanship) and in some cases bad spectators. If this is a problem, consider the following:

- 1) If a non-conference match, chalk it up to memory, and perhaps do not play them the next year. Relay your thoughts to your AD.
- 2) If it is a conference team, talk with your AD. He/she should then address this issue with that school's AD. Follow the channels. Same could be done with non-conference games.
- 3) I have seen teams do a 180 degree change simply with a coaching change. A firmer approach can quickly turn a team around. By nature, most tennis players prefer this. Also, individual players can dramatically change misbehavior when they learn to manage anger and emotions.
- 4) A team totally out of control with a coach who cannot control them is "RARE." If this happens, notify your AD and recommend that they should be reported to your state's association (ex: NCHSAA).
- 5) The coach is responsible for spectators' behavior at home matches. This is usually not a problem. If your parents are new to the sport and do not understand, parents cannot assist line calls, cannot talk to or coach players.
- 6) There should be no clapping or cheering for obvious errors or double faults. A brief meeting, text or email can bring your parents' following up to speed. If people only watch the U.S. Open, they may think this is normal. Not in high school.

IN MATCH COACHING

Coaches (designated) are allowed to talk to their players on the odd game changer. Not 1st game but everything thereafter/90 second change-over.

My thoughts:

- 1) If your players (S or D) are winning, leave them alone. Let them keep their focus.
- 2) If you spot an obvious weakness in an opponent that your player is not aware of, let them know.
- 3) When coaching, keep instructions simple, with one or two suggestions. Too many details will confuse the player.
- 4) If your player has a stroking mistake that is losing them points, suggest a correction. Ex: ground strokes are landing short.
Tip: Hit “thru the ball” and bend your knees.
- 5) If the match is tightly contested, encourage and praise your player. “Pep” them up. Remind them to keep playing hard. High Energy stuff... not a time for technical details.

Side Bar:

Teach your players how you like to handle the 90 second coaching changeover. Remind players that “coaching” **is not** “criticism.”

When the other coach is talking to their player/players for the full 90 seconds, it can be good for you. They are perhaps “over coaching” and too much information is often hard to process and put into action.

If parents want to offer suggestions, I can deal with some but not too much!

FOOT FAULTS

This is a technical error and usually hinders and does not help the server.

I may correct my players but not opponents unless they are running to the net.

Foot faults usually result in the serve going long. Make 1 or 2 points in changeover coaching. Or just offer motivations! “Keep it up!” -- “Play Well” -- “This is a good match!” – “Stay Focused!” Or sometimes be casual and show your calmness. It can rub off on your players.

IN MATCH COACHING SITUATIONS

Situation: Hitting an opponent with the ball in a close/exciting match is my intention to win the point, not to harm you. This keeps the match at a respectable level. I have found that players play better when they treat each other as simply opponents and not enemies.

Situation: In doubles, your team is easily winning. Your players are having fun but also laughing and being “silly” with each other. They need to stop because their opponents may think that they are being laughed at. This is being disrespectful. Good kids do this sometimes without realizing the impact. It needs to be taught. We call this “toying.” It can occur in singles as well. This is not a good look for any team.

Tennis Prep Card (see Section 5)

Practice Plan (see Section 5)

SECTION 3

PRACTICE

Pre-Practice: Some kids like to hit before practice. Others may choose to catch up later. I give these 4-5 minutes. When we start practice “focus begins.”

Warm-Ups: Agility, stretching, jogging and perhaps quick feet drills (many ways to do this). Coaches can prepare their own routines.

Team Talk: Bring team together to explain the day’s practice and objectives. Be brief but concise. Encourage great effort and focus.

Practice: The following is a list of drills or activities I may have the team perform. I may pick from the list the drills of the day. They vary according to our needs.

Generally, I explain practice concepts that have worked for our teams. As a coach, good practice is the foundation of developing a team that will improve, show confidence and take pride in their collective efforts.

You “play as you practice” is very true in our sport. As an individual sport, bad habits and poor technique can be exposed quickly.

Practice Pointers

1. Stress to your stronger players that their efforts and attitudes in practice will be noticed by all. Stress to them the need to be “self-starters.” Those who follow directions and lead by example will have a “huge positive impact” on a team’s success.
2. You may have to teach your stronger players the drills you expect. They may have to drill independently as you work with the inexperienced players to bring them up to speed.
3. A volunteer or assistant coach can be very helpful when you have various skill levels.
4. Practice adjustments are common. It can depend on number of courts, players and coaches. Work on what works for you.

Practice Suggestions

Over time, adults and kids change as do work and training habits. As a former P.E. teacher and coach, I always made note of finding kids playing or working out on their own. I see far less kids and adults playing sports unless it is on an organized basis. This trend is also prevalent at the high school level.

In tennis, many players take lessons. The most lacking part of junior development is match and set play. Rarely in the past 10-12 years have I seen kids at parks or clubs playing matches with friends, parents or teammates. Highly ranked players will find the time for this.

As coaches we need to implement more practice TBs or sets in practice. With “no fear” of losing their ladder position, I do *challenge matches* the first 1-3 weeks in practice to avoid confusion. Make a clear distinction between a **practice** and **challenge** match.

Most junior players should be playing (practice or team matches) about 8-10 sets weekly with a variety of skill levels.

ABC Routine

- A. Short Court Hitting – 2 or 4 per court. Ground stroke volley -volley inside service blocks. Volley to baseline (switch) Ground strokes, lob for overheads) (5-8 minutes)
- B. Baseline Hitting - 2 or 4 per court. Rally straight then crosscourt forehands and crosscourt backhands. Hit rally balls 15-20 balls ++ (5-8 minutes)
- C. Serve & Return – 2 or 4 per court. Practice serve and catch. Practice Deuce & Ad Courts (5-8 minutes)

The ABC Routine can last 15 minutes as an extended warm-up or 30 minutes plus for a drilling session. This is generally good for medium to advanced players. Teach routine and stress individual pride in this practice time. You will have to talk them through until they know it. Emphasize that this is how many college players begin practice. “*Expect more and you may get better results.*”

Single Drills

- 1) Short Court Hitting. Backup to baseline
- 2) Mini-Tennis (inside service block)
- 3) Rally Hitting 10-15-20 ball rallies
- 4) Ground stroke games (no serve) 7, 11, or 15 points
- 5) "King of the Court" 3-4 per court
- 6) Ground stroke game, crosscourt only
- 7) 7 point "no net" game
- 8) 5 ball playouts
- 9) Play 7 & 10 point TBs
- 10) Team Tennis (2 on each team)

I will draw up a few practice plans and how to use drills. Select 2-3 per practice. Same for Doubles.

Double Drills

- 1) 2 on 2 playouts. Feed in from baseline and play.
- 2) "2-2 Switch Drill" – alternate hits every rally.
- 3) Ground stroke game (only crosscourt forehand, can use doubles lines.
- 4) Ground stroke game (only crosscourt backhand, can use doubles lines.
- 5) FAST Doubles -- Play doubles with no serve (feed ball in Reg. position and switch every point, underhand serve.
- 6) "Rotation" 5 play, 2 receive.
5 gets Double and Double gets single courts
2 pts. 5 can win 2
Rec. split 1 point each

PRACTICE IDEAS & DRILLS

There are many ways to structure your team practices. As you will see there are many drills that can improve play.

Playing practice and challenge matches can benefit also. My observations over the past several years are that players tend to play less

matches on their own than previous years, whether at tennis clubs or local parks. Generally, clinics are geared for drilling and group instruction.

Practice Ideas

- 1) ABCs, warmups and drilling
- 2) Ground Stroke Games. Have one player drop hit or feed ball to a teammate across net. After they return it start playing the point out. (Do not use serve here). Bad feeds or returns can be redone. You may start point after 2 over net.

Singles Drills

- 1) Ground stroke game (play 7, 11 or 15 pt.)
- 2) Use for Rally hitting (10-15 or 20 balls)
- 3) Ground stroke game (only crosscourt, can use Doubles lines)
- 4) Ground stroke game (only crosscourt backhand, can use Doubles lines)
- 5) "King of the Court" 3-4 players per court
- 6) 5-6 ball hits, then play-out the point
- 7) "7" point "No Net" Game - Any player hitting their shot in net loses all points. (Their score reverts to 0. A ground stroke long or wide loses 1 point.)
- 8) Up & Down River - First player to 5 points moves up a court; losers move down a court.
- 9) Attack Drill - Good closing to drill. Player feeds ball over net then moves toward net. When opponent returns ball to you, Split Step volley and then move forward until both are at the net. You may keep a 2nd ball in off hand to keep drill going if error occurs. Emphasize hitting the ball straight to keep the drill alive.

NOTE:

I usually have 2-3 drills picked for practice. Then after ABC warm-up, we pair and continue practice on selected drills. There are 9 listed drills and we use those that fit our needs. Sometimes we may briefly warm-up (5-8 min) then have a **Drill Day** where we select more. Drills that can give us repetition and create competition keep a high energy level in practice.

Doubles Drills

Using same feed in ground stroke game principles. Usually 4 per court, 2 on 2.

- 1) 1 or 2 ball play-outs - Player feed in hit 2-3 then play out the point.
Games 5-7 points or your call.
- 2) 2 on 2 Switch - Player feeds in. After a ground stroke is hit, players must alternate hitting the return shot. Creates sideways movement on the court. High energy and works players using all areas of the court. Both teams start from the baseline but can move to the net if the short ball forces them forward. Games 5-7 points or your call.
- 3) 2 on 2 Attack Drill - Same drill as in Singles except players can keep 2 balls going crosscourt. Or a team can feed in and move as a team. Return ball straight at opponent to keep the volleys moving.
- 4) "Fast Doubles" - Good drill for players new to doubles. Coach should review doubles positions and responsibilities. Perhaps a walk-through. Players play tandem form - one up, one back.
Play a regular or No-Ad scoring. Server drops serve or underhand serves to start the point. Play the "friendly" return. If serve is close but out, continue play. This gives players a chance to learn the return patterns and regular rules of doubles without the overhead serve. Players with poor serves can make doubles a struggle to enjoy.

This game is a lead-up but can help develop the non-serve skills. Good for any level but better for new and intermediate players. Helps players understand the different positions and shots used in doubles.

Doubles Drill from carts - I have a few drills that are my favorite.

Olympic Drill

Purpose: To help players lose their fear of net volleys.

Set-up :

2 players at net in volley post. Coach – at side post ready to feed.
2 players on baseline ready for ground stroke

2 players behind them comes in when they miss or move to the net. Coach feeds to baseline and player returning first ground stroke crosscourt to net person. Net players play out volleys. Can remain at net until a pair gets 2 straight points on them.

When they get 2 points they run to net positions around the post. Net players run to back of baseline where the waiting 2 players step in.

Coach does a 1-2-3 count then feeds lob to baseliners who now try to win 2 points on new net players (no lobs on this drill).

Hitting cross court on the 1st feed keeps the coach in charge. This prevents the 1st ground stroke from always going to the weaker player.

We do this with boys and girls as it really builds confidence in returning hard net shots. Play games to 12 or 15 points then switch sides. On 2nd game, players can switch from deuce to Ad sites.

“KNOCK-OUT” - Purpose to add in an approach shots and groundstrokes. To work on middle and hits from service line in.

Set up 6 Players is ideal. Coach at side of net post
3 players per side (team)
2 at baseline and 1 waiting behind them
(Play games to 12 of 15 points)

Coach feeds in either a baseline ground stroke or a “shortie” (ball around the service line making the player move forward). If one player comes to the net, their partner should also.

The point is played out, then player making the error or missed shot is knocked out and is replaced by a teammate off the court. Play moves on quickly. Feed the ball to a ready player on either side. Make them run for balls.

Keep short ball feeds near or just inside the service line to create match-like situations. This drill can be lively and competitive.

Knock-Out Benefits. Best done with 6 players. Works on approach shot, split step volleys. You could add a lob element from baseline because the player-in-waiting can clear loose balls near baseline.

Also, you can have other team members working, drilling or playing on other court. A coach should position themselves to observe all courts and their activity.

Cart-fed Drills

It can be difficult to have carts of new tennis balls every year. I have found for practice feeding:

- 1) Have players bring used balls from home to add to your used match balls.
- 2) Find a tennis club or center and they usually cycle out drill balls every so often (Babolof Gold is a good practice ball). Better you get them there than from a dumpster.
- 3) This is what I use drills for:
Feeding for overheads (from the side). Solid varsity players should be able to feed their partner from the baseline. You would be surprised at how many cannot. When feeding for overheads (from the side), I often give them one off balance just to get back over.

OBSERVATION

In the last 5-10 years I have noticed that young people in all sports seem to play less on their own. Perhaps television, video games, phones and numerous other choices are to blame.

I incorporate more games, challenges and PRACTICE matches than just doing drills. Kids love to play doubles. And everything does “not” have to be a challenge match. “Fun is an essential part of playing tennis.”

JV or Varsity Practice

- Individual Hitting before official practice begins
- Bring players in. Briefly chat and greet players (2-3 min.)
- Be positive and explain the day

- 1) Footwork Drills (10-12 min.)
 Ropes, line hops. 3 ball pickups
 Cones or ladders OR "B" loops OR a RUN.
 They need to move to settle down.
- 2) Warm-Ups (2 or 4 per court) (15-25 min)
 Short court hits, DL and crosscourt
 Pepper, volley-volley, DL and crosscourt
- 3) Ground Strokes
 Middle 10-15 ball Rallies
 F – CC B – CC
 F – DL B – DL
 Hit 6-7 serves and overheads

Water Break (3-4 min)

Drill Segment: (20-25 min)

Explain purpose of Drill -- Single & Doubles

Single: No net TB – 5 points. While playing any ball, if hit into net the players score reverts to 0
 GS game 1st to 11 points
 "King of the Court" 3 points
 4 Ball play-outs – can play King of the Court with this drill start playing on the 5th ball.

Doubles: No Net TB - points
 2 on 2 playouts
 2 on 2 Attack
 4 ball playouts
 TB – No-Ad scoring & Ad

- 4) Teach Segment:
 Players are ready to listen.
 Cover 3 things 1) Rule segment, 2) Strategy, 3) Code/Rule
 Special Drill or playing a 10 point TB or practice sets

5) Conditioning and Warm-Up

- Agility or 3/4 speed sprints
- Avoid full speed sprints until players are safe from muscle pulls
- I often do 7-8 full court sprints after home matches if match was only 1 hour +/- 30 minutes or less

SECTION 4

STRATEGY SLOGANS TO REMEMBER

- **“Grind it ‘til you find it”**
(Maintaining GS rallies until you get a short ball)
- **Build to point to control the corners**
(Rally shots until you can hit toward a corner)
- **Big Points, Big Part of the Court**
(Strategy for close matches)
- **1st Serve In - Cross Court Spin**
(Strategy for close matches)
- **“If you’re Way Down, Just Hang Around”**
(Don’t Quit)
- **“Drop your Seat to Hit it Sweet”**
(Bend knees for better GS)
- **Solve the Riddle down the Middle**
(Good strategy for Doubles)

Mid-Court & Doubles

- **Full Court Full Stroke. Half Court, Half the Stroke. At net- No stroke, volley.**
(Swing paths for court areas)
- **Ball is slow - Keep it in the Flow**
(Low hit balls near the net)
- **“If they Hang it - you can Bang it**
(High hit balls above the net)
- **Volley Away from the Source**
(When net player volleys from a GS shot)
- **Volley is High - Say “Goodbye”**
(High balls hit above the net)

- **Be like a Bear, not a Mailbox – a Mailbox “scares no one”** (Poaching pointer – be aggressive, not passive)

Ideal Junior Strokes

Forehand - Eastern or Semi-Western

Backhand - Eastern and 2 handed

*1 handed backhands can be difficult for most junior players to execute.

Volley - Continental for Forehand and Backhand & Reflex volley

Overhead - Continental

(see Grip Guide in Section 5)

*The Western Grip can be effective if a player has been trained and can manage it. This can be difficult for a novice player and can also lead to injuries.

*Players can hit good topspin with the semi-Western grip.

Stroke Corrections

1) Serve - Lift arm up for good serve. "Arm up...Ball in"

Toss	11-11:30	Kick
	12-1:00	Flat
	1-2:30	Slice

Avoid Palm Tosses (use fingers)

2) Ground strokes

- Raising up too soon
- Hitting too hard (loosen grip)
- Players should relax their grips and let it Rip

Topspin – use "windshield wiper" motion

Flat - "Kiss the Bicep" (low and high motion)

Volleys- ½ or less - unit turn

Slow balls - Redirect

Volley Deep - Redirect

SERVE AND RETURN

Serve

1. Toss. "Arm Up...Ball In"
2. 3 serves for High School - 1) Flat 2) Slice 3) Kick

3. Foot Faults can cause errors. Keep lead foot down.
4. High percent of 1st serves are always good.

Return of Serve

1. Adjust stance location; depends on depth of serve
2. Fast Serves (open stance); Turn & Hit
3. Slower Serves; Move forward and use more top spin or slice. Turn more semi-open or closed
4. Attack weak 2nd serves.

My first team, I taught some of them private lessons in 1981. In 2025, I still play doubles with and against some of them. There is a special bond that money cannot buy.

Once players have a solid foundation, tennis camps and numerous tennis activities will become available for players.

POWER OF WORDS

Be positive. When we say “don’t,” it creates tentative action. Players should *try* to be aggressive.

AVOID

Winning

Close out

You got this

Keep the ball in - Don't hit it out

Tight Match

Way Down 1-4 2nd set

(Won the 1st)

3 R's

Don't Choke!

Tight Match

Instead, Say

Compete for every point

Keep going

What does 4-1 Mean? Ahead in score means nothing!

Hit thru the ball!

Big Points/Big Part of the Court

Way Down...Hang Around!

Compete for all points. Same if you are ahead or behind.

React, Relax, Refocus

(A ritual between points to relieve stress)

Loosen Grip

1st Serve In

Crosscourt Spin - 1st serve In

Work to Win
Don't hit it out

Give Best Effort
Head Down, Feet on the Ground
Drop your seat, Hit it Sweet!!!

PRE-MATCH

Most teams allow a brief hitting/warm-up period prior to team introductions. *Note:* As time "PERMITS. This is **NOT** Required.

If courts are available, I like all players to be able to hit. Having only starters hit is a coach's call. If the match is expected to be close, I choose this option sometimes.

Team Introductions should begin after coaches have properly exchanged and accepted line-ups (see *NCHSAA guidelines*).

Having teams assemble at the gate or on the court is a coach's call. Lining up on a court is a more formal approach and it can give spectators a chance to see everyone.

I briefly talk to both teams about match format, scoring and maintaining good calls, and sportsmanship at all times. Also remind players to call out scores before serving.

A coach can announce the standard warning, point, game default steps. However, with **no** officials at high school matches this should be discussed with the opposing coach before the match.

I try to speak in a positive manner about both teams to help avoid behavior issues.

I have not been announcing the point penalty code. It is a coach's call.

Match Reminders

- Coaches are responsible for home spectator behavior. Rarely is this an issue.

- Parents can be brought up to speed with an email regarding concerns.
- Spectators cannot help or be asked to help line calls.
- Avoid clapping or cheering on double faults or bad unforced errors.

Remind players that all high school players may not understand the rules and nuances of the game. Not all players have had equal tennis training.

Situation:

You have a good team and you are playing a significantly weaker team. Remind your players that it never hurts to say a positive word to someone you are beating 6-0, 5-0. It is a chance to be an ambassador for our sport.

Situation:

Your opponent hits your teammate with a ball after a volley exchange. They should not “high 5” their teammate. If you hit someone with a played ball it is customary to put your hand up and say “sorry.” You are just letting them know that it wasn’t intentional.

Stroke and Grip Issues

Changing strokes as the season begins can be difficult. Usually not enough time or patience.

The following is a list of grips/strokes that you may encounter with young players. They can be effective until or if the player chooses to switch to conventional grips. Learning Correct Grips (See Grip Guide) will increase a player's potential!

Serve - Eastern Forehand grip. Quite common. Can hit a flat serve. This grip hinders pronation where power and spin can be achieved. They need to be taught the Continental grip.

2-Handed Backhand - Eastern Forehand Grip on both hands. The 2-handed side will lack topspin and power because the racquet face will tilt under the ball (see grip guide).

Volleys - Learning the Continental grip takes time and effort. A must for the serious player. However, a novice player can do the following:

Forehand volley – use the Eastern Forehand grip

Reflex Volley – use the body. Use 2-handed Backhand to block the ball.

Learning the Continental Grip: This can be practiced almost daily. Have players choke up and use the grip at the top of the racket handle or throat. Even use a compression or slower ball. Then have a teammate short toss balls to the Forehand-Backhand and Reflex areas. Kids need to feel the grip and practice this in a controlled non-competitive manner. Let a partner toss the ball and switch every few minutes.

Emphasize: This grip has many uses. Volley, serves, overheads, slice. Also, pickleball, badminton and other racquet sports.

Let players do “shadow” drills, i.e. practice serves without a ball. It gives them a feel for the wrist snap (pronation).

Shadow Drills: Practice correct stroking motions. Serve FH, BH & Volley ***without*** a ball.

CAP METHOD (Control, Accuracy, Power) – Common sequence steps to perform tennis skills.

Novice Players

In our state and nationwide we are seeing an increase in the number of small schools being built. Small schools may favor sports that fit their budgets.

My first tennis coaching job was in Hillsborough, NC at Orange High School. We were blessed with 8 courts used for school and recreation use. The first year we worked as a club. Then we had girls' and boys' teams the following year.

Here are some of the situations that may arise with a new program.

- 1) “Coach, I want to play but I don't have a racket”
Answer: You can usually find one for them.
- 2) “Coach, I just started taking lessons 3 months ago. Can I come out for the team?”

Answer: Yes to both questions above if you need players.

3) Coach, should I take some private lessons or go to a tennis camp?

Answer: If possible, take 6-7 private lessons. Perhaps from your coach, local pro or a high school player with experience.

Players need correct (not perfect) stroking patterns before they begin competing. Bad strokes lead to injuries, poor performance, and little fun.

Mixed Levels of Ability

High School teams have various skill levels. Stronger teams usually have players that have had clinics, lessons and some tournament experience.

Many of the drills in this guide are geared toward intermediate level/advanced players. Many drills start with a hand feed to initiate the drill.

The first team I coached had about 4-5 players who competed well at the 3A level. Then we had 3-4 intermediates. (They had ground strokes but weak serves.) Then 4-5 novice players who were new to the game.

My practices went as follows: I taught the 4-5 advanced players a 30 to 35 minute routine (see ABCs) they could perform on their own. (Emphasize good practice habits. They were expected.) Even match play, single or doubles at times.

The intermediates may be doing practice games and drills without the overhead serve. Emphasize good forehand and backhand techniques.

The novice group would be doing a 3-step sequence:

- 1) Warm-up, and hit inside service box. Play mini tennis with underhand serves.
- 2) Next, go to T-ball. Player stand in "no-mans" land and hits rally ground strokes aiming for the center serve T.
- 3) As this improves players then move back to baseline and rally full court hitting ball on 1st or 2nd bounce. Keep good follow-thru as best as possible.

The next sequence can be teaching intermediate and novice players correct serving techniques.

The advanced group could be playing practice or challenge matches.

As your team moves forward, your intermediate and novice kids can now play practice singles and doubles with regular serves (exactly what they need.) You can then take advanced players and work on cart-fed drills as listed in this guide.

As the season wears on, your starters will enjoy new drills and games as they are getting plenty of competitive matches, which is a nice change of pace.

Talking Points

1. While coaching, I kept a list of Talking Points in my practice schedule. That should be covered during the season.
2. Will not explain in full as these can be found in rule books or on Google easily.
 - a) Keep match focus (visualize)
 - b) Hitting Rules – as listed in the guide
 - c) Line calls and USTA rules on this
 - d) Serve & Return positions
 - e) Managing Emotions and Anger. Emotion can be good, but too much can rob a player's energy.
 - f) 5–6-foot fence rule. Players and spectators should maintain that distance outside the fence. Any closer can be a distraction.
 - g) Playing close matches, stay calm, in control and consistent. "1st serve in C court spin. Also on "Big Points," hit to Big part of the court.
 - h) Another talking or teaching point is as follows: Coaches and players remember that teaching and practice can benefit from 2 main methods.

Whole–Part–Whole: Demonstrate the entire skills or activity first. Then break it down into parts. Ex: On serve perform the stance, then toss, then swing paths. Practice with no ball can be okay. As parts are added complete the process.

Short-to-Long: Practice skills close in then move back as players have success. Work for any skill. Ex: Hand toss for volley or groundstroke practice. On many skills, start closer to

the net then
PREPARATION”

move back to baseline. **“VICTORY LOVES**

Middle School and Junior Varsity

Some N.C. Districts may have Middle School or Junior Varsity tennis teams. They fall under NCHSAA rules.

Match formats may vary. Eight game pro sets are normal for time reasons. Or maybe doubles first. Each conference makes its own decision as Middle School and Junior Varsity do not have state play-offs. They may have conference tournaments if they choose.

Most of the drills and situations at this level are covered in this guide.

PRACTICE PLAN (See Section 5)

Coach & Player Resources

1. In the coaching and teaching journey of gathering new information, we are living in the best of times. Google can be a great resource in all areas of our game. You could have players watch matches to drive home teaching points.
2. The NCHSAA is our home base for rules, regulations and the function of high school and middle school tennis in North Carolina. Their website provides all the information to maintain compliance, dates and play-off information.
3. They do a great job in structuring all high school athletics.
4. Max Preps – allows coaches access to stats, schedules and team information throughout the State.

I hope you find this guide helpful. I was able to coach 38 boys' and 32 girls' Varsity tennis teams in my coaching career at Hillsborough's Orange High School, Chapel Hill High School and East Chapel Hill High School. It has been a blessing in many ways. I have met and worked with great kids and parents. Tennis seems to draw self-motivated and self-disciplined kids.

Do not let “social media” and comments like “these kids today” dampen your efforts. Kids will appreciate your efforts. Be firm, fair and up front. Remember, all team sports have a social component players really seem to enjoy.

Serve & Return Drills

Serves:

We simply have 4 players per court: 2 serving deuce and Ad sides. Have 2 others on the receiving side. Servers practice their serves (mostly flat & slice). Receivers retrieve balls and place in basket on their side.

Then serve back to others side. I find it easier to focus when the receiving side is not returning shots. Servers need only to focus on their serves.

Return Drills:

Have 2 per court. Player "A" is at the net hitting volleys. Player "B" stands inside the baseline and returns shots to volleyer. Receiver Player B returns shot "on the rise" and should **not** back up behind the baseline. Good for receiver to just turn and hit (open) like a hard first serve.

- These 2 drills could be used in the ABC routine.
- Also good drill that teaches hitting the ball "on the rise" so players are not retreating to the back fence for high bouncing balls (and lobs).

CONDITIONING DRILLS

Individual Tennis Workouts (for home and weekends)

Strength:

Push-ups (55 stack*)
Planks (60 seconds; 2-3 reps)
Squats (25; 2-3 reps)
V-Ups (20; 2-3 reps)
Ski-Squat (1 min; 2-3 reps)
Tricep Dips (15-20; 2-3 reps)

*Stack means push-ups, 3 sets of 8-10 or perform 10-9-8-7-6-5-...etc. in a sequence as your strength allows.

Create your own routine. Exercises do not have to happen all at once.

You may do 3 exercises one night and 3 different ones the next.

Stretch:

Arm Swings, Hamstrings, Stretch, "Frogs" Calf stretch" Leg Kicks.

Cardio Activities:

One-half & 1-mile runs, run hills. Walk down. Half-court basketball, soccer or frisbee. "Move, Move, Move!" etc., Playing tennis sets 3-5. Win or lose, it is good training.

HELPFUL DETAILS FOR THE COACH

Windscreens can be helpful or a hinderance! They can block good viewing areas. During March and April there is usually some strong wind. I have seen wind blow fences with windscreens almost over. At one school, I had my fence damaged by high winds. Windscreens should not be very tightly attached. Consult your school's AD.

In late July or early August, check courts for wasps and nests. Bleachers, bushes and net posts can hide them. Wasps arrive when you least expect it.

Tennis court nets can usually last several years. Cleaning your net straps with water, a mild cleanser and some "elbow grease" can give a new and clean look. Grit and mildew can build up on them.

When nets come loose from the white tape on the top, replacement straps are about \$30.00. Gives your black net and courts a new look. I have done this for many years. Students always think we have bought new nets.

A **Team Mom** or **Parent** can be very helpful. I have had some great ones, typically a junior or senior's parent who knows the program.

UNIFORMS Generally, seniors and a **Team Mom** work on this each spring for girls' team before August practice. Consult with your AD on this. Try to have uniforms that can be used for at least 2 years or longer. For boys, talk to the rising seniors briefly. Sometimes we buy 2 shirts to have a change for the late season heat. A hoodie can be nice for both teams. Your Booster Club representative is an excellent resource for these. Most teams buy their own

uniforms. They can then wear them in summer. Typically, players like apparel with their school and team logo on them.

A well-uniformed team gives a sense of pride for players and parents. This also sends a message to your opponents as well. (I am not a fan of sleeveless shirts for boys; for girls it is a more acceptable look.)

It is helpful to keep a Tennis bulletin board in the school or at the courts for information, teaching and photos of your team.

Use MaxPreps. Coaches can use it in many ways. Players and parents can view the site as well as the press and public.

I close with these thoughts: Enjoy your coaching journey. Engage your players. They respond to terms such as "Us", "We", & "Ours".

As a coach, it is always great when a former player remembers you years down the road!

NCHSTCA (North Carolina High School Tennis Coaches Association) is a great resource for promoting your team, conferences, and individual players. It also serves as a forum for coaches to communicate their ideas and concerns. Membership is voluntary.

I am a PTR (Professional Tennis Registry) member and Certified Level 2 Teaching Pro. Feel free to email or call me and share your concerns and journey.

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SECTION 5

Attachments

The Grip Guide
Player Information Form
Team Rules (East Chapel Hill Tennis Team)
Try-Outs Schedule and Information
Tennis Prep Card
Self-starter Expectations
Daily Practice Schedule - (Blank Form)

