

## *Coaching Mastery—Book 3*

# Chapter 12

## *The ‘Club’ Professional*

### Improve your ‘reputation’ as a dynamic teaching pro

Unfortunately, tennis ‘instructors’ come a dime a dozen. (But anywhere between \$15 and \$100 dollars an hour!) This is not to say that there are not great instructors in many cities around the world. However, many who believe they play tennis well think they can teach it well. (And, many who don’t play tennis well sometimes believe they can teach tennis well!) And, probably most unfortunate is that many students are led to believe they are well on their way to playing tennis more and more skillfully through such inadequate, inaccurate, and ignorant advice that many of these instructors are offering. Nothing is more distressing to me than to watch a person within a lesson of any kind, being taught methods that **MUST** change for the player to advance. I have expanded on this concept ad nauseam, but even within the tennis teaching industry, we see many pros basically guaranteeing a student to play tennis well below their potential because of the flaws in this philosophy of teaching transitory methods that ‘get a player playing tennis quickly’ but then creates frustration when such players can’t get past a particular playing level. (Usually the 3.0 or 3.5 level for most.)



**Figure 1:** Developing a program that is productive and proficient, combined with personality and personal care, passion and pride, usually produces programs that grow and sustain growth.

The problem is that in tennis, a player can learn any one of a multitude of hitting methods and perceive a sense of improvement through simple human attrition to any movement. That is, over time, almost anyone can figure out how to manage a racquet so that it intersects with a moving ball in such a way that it ‘caroms’ the ball back into the opponent’s court. Many players believe that if they spend enough years and hit enough balls a certain way, they will somehow

acquire more prolific form over time. Not only is this completely false, but the mere act of ‘practicing’ techniques that are inadequate will make the actual acquisition of proper techniques that much more difficult.

The other problem in developing players is that those ‘proper’ techniques, those that will allow a player to progress in hitting more effective shots more consistently, (as well as defend against better shots hit by better opponents), usually feel far less comfortable, familiar and confident by most who begin playing tennis. Thus, many pros, those who want to appease the ‘instant gratification’ of their students will often avoid such methods in favor of those that provide a more comfortable and confident emotion and sense of success within their students. I can hear those pros now: “Well, the continental grip on the serve and volley are more difficult, so let’s work on using a grip that will give you confidence and allow you to experience more success in match play. We’ll look at changing you once you have the eastern grips mastered.”



**Figure 2:** Developing players can happen anywhere. Even as I have taught in California, Arizona and Utah, I have conducted workshops and camps all over. Above, is a tennis camp held in Maine in 2006.

Well, while such an approach has logic written all over it, it fails miserably in reality and in helping any student reach their true potential.

This is not to say there are not many exceptional tennis professionals out there, as I have mentioned. There are. However, in my experience, there are so many egos within the profession that many teaching pros often wear blinders in terms of being open to different opinions and methodologies. Many pros tell players what to do, but they have no idea why they are telling them to do ‘it’ a certain way, other than that is the way THEY do it—or did it! (And, quite frankly, many pros think they do it one way when in reality, they do it differently than they think!)



**Figure 3:** Certified tennis professionals are encouraged to attend workshops and classes on tennis. Here, I am speaking to a group of pros in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

However, if you are reading this book, chances are you are not wearing the metaphorical blinders I just mentioned, nor are you so rigid in your teaching that you are not open to hearing other ideas and philosophies. It has always amazed me the vast number of teaching professionals, including those who are certified, seldom have more than a couple tennis books. In addition, a very small percentage of

teaching pros attend ‘continuing education’ classes that are offered all around the country through various tennis teaching associations and tennis industry leaders.

As I have mentioned, the hard part in this profession is that even through simple attrition, students can improve using just about any method you give them. But, as mentioned in the early part of this book, not all methods result in a player reaching their potential. On the contrary, there are far more methods that will virtually permanently cause stagnation in a player at levels well below their potential than there are methods that will help a player reach the highest skill level they wish to pursue. That is why you see millions of tennis players using many different methods to play tennis, at ability levels far below that which such players are capable of. Go to any club or public court and you will see diversity in playing styles similar to snow flakes: no two players seem to play the same. And, conversely, few of them play at very prolific levels. While professionals can be identified by particular idiosyncrasies and personal characteristics, we can clearly identify the foundation of stroke patterns that is common among all pros.



**Figure 4:** Skilled tennis looks very different than unskilled tennis. While there are many ways in which to hit a tennis ball, there are certainly far fewer ways that lead to skilled tennis. Above, a former student of mine and ATP Tour Professional, A.J. Bartlett rips a running topspin forehand.

It is very frustrating that we often hear television commentators mention things like, “There is more than one way to hit a tennis ball well.” While they obviously are quite right, this statement infers that nearly all ways to learn to hit a ball will result in prolific play.

And this is quite wrong.



**Figure 5:** Compare this forehand of a 3.5 level player to that of Figure 4.

The reality is that most pros and skilled players learned tennis within similar foundations. As I have mentioned several times, using an Advanced Foundation, like that found within my two books, players are free to embellish and enhance such foundations to create the diversity we do indeed see between skilled players. If there were so many ways to learn tennis correctly, then why is it that over 90% of the playing public can't move past a 4.0 NTRP level?

Is it because they are not athletic enough?

Is it because they don't have enough desire?

Is it because they don't have the right opportunities?

### **No, No, and NO!**

With only very few exceptions, every player—short of having a specific handicap or disability—has enough athleticism, most have plenty of desire and, unless someone lives on a deserted island, everyone has ample opportunity.

The difference between those who stagnate and those who reach higher levels of skilled play is the way they were taught tennis. (Or, for those who are 'self-taught,' the way they learned tennis.)

As a teaching pro, you need to understand this concept. It is important for you to educate your students that there are two paths in which they will need to take:

**Path One:** Learn simple methods, play tennis fast, become frustrated and stagnate nearly just as fast.

Or,

**Path Two:** Spend a period of time learning correct methods, work through some of the initial frustration of unfamiliar grips or methods, and then enjoy the continued progress and reach more prolific levels of skilled play.

### **Educating your Students**

Many of your first-time students will be relatively new to tennis. They will either be raw beginners or, after trying unsuccessfully to play tennis well, they have come to you for guidance and tutelage.

These players will need to understand the processes you will be using and, they will need to comprehend what they can realistically expect from these processes, based on their level of desire, opportunity and athleticism. If you provide this understanding in a tangible form, (such as a flier outlining your philosophy), your students will not only respect you, they will often be far more motivated to work hard for you.

### **Can EVERYONE Become SKILLED?**

The obvious answer to this heading is no. However, among many who are involved in the profession of tennis often assume that very few players can reach "skilled" levels of play. They believe that pros are super human athletes, and top college players and top juniors and players who play 5.0 NTRP level tournaments are gifted, athletically prone, and totally dedicated to a pursuit of tennis excellence. And, while there are those who fit this description, I can tell you from first-hand experience, that many of those who have reached prolific and skilled levels of

tennis did not fit all of these criteria. In fact, many of my highest ranked juniors and adults started off as players who seemed to be short in many of these departments.

I say this because I have seen more pros and coaches dismiss players because they appeared to be less capable or certainly limited in the criteria they considered prerequisites in reaching skilled tennis performance.

In my 35 years teaching, I have been amazed at the number of such players who appeared initially unable to play skilled tennis. Even today, I see more exceptions than the rule in this. Let me make something very clear:

***When players are given the right methods to learn and practice, and, the right progression and tools to learn, they often progress far beyond that of which even experienced teaching pros and coaches can predict.***

One of my goals in writing this book was to educate pros and coaches alike in this statement. So many pros and coaches believe that it is rare and simply unlikely that any give student can reach prolific and advanced levels of skilled tennis. I'm here to tell you that nearly all the students you teach not only can reach such levels, but if you provide the right motivation, they will believe they can achieve such goals. In fact, most will embrace learning to the degree that they will surprise themselves!

### **Successful Tennis Teachers**

What separates great pros from the mediocre; the successful programs from the 'ghost towns'? As far as successful tennis facilities go, you can't go be the adage, "if you build it they will come." There are huge tennis facilities all over the world. Yet, many of them fail miserably while others become profitable, recognized, and celebrated. Is it because some use a famous name? Well, I know of one facility that uses a famous tennis instructor's name and yet have almost no local program and are surviving on a sprinkling of players who recognize the name. Yet, there are facilities with far less amenities, yet are burgeoning with participation! Players flock to many facilities for one reason or another. And, to be honest, while having a wonderful facility is great, it is the people who run the facility that will dictate the success of that facility.

### **Get In SHAPE**

While the vast majority of tennis teaching professionals are in relatively good physical shape, it has always amazed me that there are a number of pros who are over-weight and in generally poor health. While the appearance of a professional in no way prohibits that professional from understanding the game nor hinders him or her in expounding information in ways that are useful to the student. However, the "perception" of a pro's understanding of the game by students can be influenced by the appearance of a teaching pro. Just like the "first impressions" that are often formulated by people on first dates, job interviews and other person-to-person interactions, a teaching pro's appearance can interfere with a student's willingness to accept or give weight to the advice from the teaching pro. An overweight, chain-smoking pro with tattered tennis clothes is almost laughable to some individuals. Certainly, while this description is an exaggeration (perhaps!), it drives home this point: Your students will be more receptive to your information if you appear to be competent by the way you present yourself.

As mentioned, clothing often can add or detract from the perception in which students will evaluate the quality of a pro. I still am amazed at one particular well-known teaching pro

who still wears 1970's style clothes when doing his camps. You can often hear the campers whisper, "Can't he afford some decent tennis attire?" While the clothing doesn't detract from the message this pro may be sending, it does detract from the way in which the message might be received. It is no wonder that very few young players would even consider his program! (And, maybe, this particular pro is simply catering to players in their fifties to seventies!)

You will want to make sure you not only look good, both from a physically fit standpoint as well as being a 'well-tailored' pro, but that your overall effort to be well groomed can be just as important. If you have a "five-o'clock" shadow at your 10:00am clinic in clothes that are wrinkled and soiled, this can be just as negative to the student as being fat and wearing rags!

### ***Tennis Certification Associations***

I've been fortunate to meet and discuss tennis with a number of very successful individuals. Some are big names, others are more obscure. However, they all provide their participants with experience knowledge in such a way that people will relate to. Personality plays into this success, but that personality is often built from a wide range of experiences: from being well read to hearing the latest in tennis teaching philosophies; from teaching little kids to working with senior players. The best pros I have seen teach from a broad range of experience. You will want to explore this...expanding your understanding of the game from your little corner of the world to meeting with and discussing tennis with practitioners from all around the world!

---

## United States Professional Tennis Association

---



**Figures 6 & 7:** The USPTA (Above) and the PTR (Below) are the two most prolific Tennis Teaching Certification programs in the U.S.

The concept of being a "Certified" pro has little to do with the label. There are certified pros who can't teach worth a lick! But, being part of a certification program provides the opportunity to communicate with so many other passionate pros! While there are thousands who seldom—if ever—attend tennis conventions, workshops or divisional conferences, there are hundreds that do.

The two specific tennis teaching certification programs in the U.S. are the United States Professional Tennis Association, (USPTA), and the Professional Tennis Registry, (PTR). Both have web sites that offer a wealth of tennis information in addition to certification requirements and procedures. ([www.uspta.com](http://www.uspta.com) & [www.ptrtennis.com](http://www.ptrtennis.com)) Both sites have unique elements, but for the most part, they have similar certification exam requirements including written, hitting, and teaching components.

### ***Being Prepared for a Conference***

Yet attending such learning opportunities does not insure the acquirement of useful tennis information. The chances of becoming a successful tennis instructor are increased when the pro looks at opportunities such as attending teaching conferences with an open mind. In addition, being a “Prepared” participant is equally important. I am usually only one of a couple pros—out of hundreds—in attendance of any convention that takes a lap top to record information. I have found that on a lap top computer, you can record up to four times the information with great understanding because those who simply write down notes are alternately looking up and down from their writing tablets only to miss something that was said while they were trying to write down what was said before! Using a computer (for those who can type half way decent!), also helps you organize the material after the conference and allows you to present it to fellow pros or make use of certain material for your own students and allows you to disseminate the information for better understanding after you arrive back home.

I have taught in three states, at tennis clubs, resorts, academies, and recreational facilities. In all three states, only a very small percentage of the pros who taught at competing clubs, those who taught even at resorts and recognized tennis schools, ever attended a tennis workshop. I know one tennis club in my home state in which the director and head pro have never attended a tennis convention in the ten years I’ve been teaching here!



**Figure 8:** Tennis programs that create challenging, competitive and fun environments attract more and more players. Make sure you are always planning and looking for ways to be inventive. Here, some of our junior players and coaches ham it up during a Wilson Racquets “Demo” day!

In addition, I have a real problem when I see tennis clubs using high school and college kids, and even parents, all of whom are not certified nor have any real tennis teaching experience, teaching beginner kids programs. I don’t mind when the head pro or director or another certified, experienced pro is leading the program and is instrumental in providing proper learning patterns, programs, and procedures. However, too many clubs and even more ‘recreational’ facilities employ very inexperienced people to teach introductory to intermediate tennis classes. If there is one group, in my opinion, that is most vulnerable to learning wrong and losing interest in tennis it is the beginning players. They need to be taught in such a way that provides proper progressions, personal and experienced pros, and done in such a way that they feel a real sense of value.

One director of tennis locally was asked why he didn’t teach more advanced levels at the local court in our city:

“What happens to the beginner and intermediate players you teach at the local public tennis facility?”

“They usually drop or quit.”

These are the programs he has high school kids teaching. In one fifteen minute clinic with about 7 kids in it, I counted 8 balls that each kid hit in fifteen minutes! So, in the half hour, each kid is going to hit around 20 balls. This is not only a joke, but it is no wonder that the kids quit!

There are ways to have kids hit well over 200 balls in a half hour. Even a class with over 30 kids in it! In fact, I host many school field trips at my club and average about 60 kids in each session. Using only 30 racquets, each kid hit about 200 ball with purpose and technique that we are teaching.

How?

Because there are ways to effectively teach large groups of players! (I have discussed this in the previous chapters!)

## **Programming Your Club**

A tennis club is only as successful as the programs offered and the passion and care offered by the staff. Plain and simple: you will fail if you don't have a sincere desire to help people improve, as well as, a desire to create programs that have value to your guests.

There are programming ideas that you can learn about at various tennis web sites. I would first suggest going to [www.uspta.com](http://www.uspta.com) and [www.ptrtennis.com](http://www.ptrtennis.com). Both tennis certification sites offer a wide range of resources for the tennis teaching professional.

However, I wanted to provide you with a listing of successful programming ideas that I have used and really believe they work well.

### ***Weekly "Fast Format" Tennis Tournament***

One of the most successful tennis programs found anywhere in the country was what I called "Super Saturday" held at our eight-court public tennis facility here in St. George. (I discussed this program briefly in **Chapter 5 of Book 1 of Coaching Mastery**)



**Figure 9:** Here, players hang out at the tournament draw board, watching others play and socializing with each other at our Super Saturday "Fast Format" weekly tournament.

While every tennis environment is different, in terms of what players are looking for and the type of competitive tournament they want, (social, tournament, leagues, etc.), I believe the Fast Format weekly tennis tournament would be just as successful as it is here in Utah! What

started out as attracting only a dozen players at first, this weekly tennis event averaged well over 40 players every week, attracting a wide range of ages, abilities and both men and women.

What made this program so popular was that it was a tournament that could be ran in under three hours or so. (Which is why we called it “Fast Format”.)

We used a dry erase white board, lined it with quarter inch lining tape (found at any office supply store), with different colors of line representing different sections of the tournament.

The format was two out of three sets, regular scoring...but the sets were the first player or team (in doubles) to three games instead of six. No tiebreakers at two games all, next game wins.

A tournament director would set up the draw so that most first round matches were very good players against weaker players. What this provided was a fast first round match, an opportunity for weak players to compete against a strong player, (something that they seldom got to do in any regular tennis program, event, or tournament!), and provided a good warm up for the better player before playing more competitive opponents. The format forced all players to stay focused as a strong player not taking each point and game seriously, did not have the luxury of coming back from several games down.

All losing players moved into a “Tier II” draw; winners continued in the “Tier I” draw. Second round losers of Tier I also move into the bottom of the Tier II draw. Losers out of the Tier II draw move into a Tier III draw.

This set up guarantees three losses for any player. The format is a variation of a “Compass Draw” but has no limitation on the number of players. We originally set it up for a 16 draw and had to expand it to a 64 draw because the popularity of the program kept growing. We would have had to go to a 128 draw if we had more courts!

The beauty of this program was that we would conduct a one-hour tennis clinic before the event that drew on average twenty players. It was a place where students (of all ages!) could learn or practice proper technique and then follow this up with a true competitive tournament. (You can see pictures and results and a list of participants—over 400 different competitors, many from other states—at [www.teachingtennis.com](http://www.teachingtennis.com))

### **Ideas to Boost Participation**

If you are at a fitness or resort-style club which offers other activities, you will want to market yourself to all your potential members and guests within the club every chance you get. Here are some ideas that can help build the tennis “passion” at your club.

1. **Tennis Pictures:** Design poster-like fliers which feature pro players, identifiable name pros that nearly anyone can recognize. Next to these pictures, include something about your tennis program; member group lesson, private lessons, Cardio Tennis, etc. Use captions for the pros with bubbles of them saying something like, “Come learn how to play like ME at so-and-so’s tennis class” or something like this. These generate interest, infuse humor and help people identify your tennis program with the pros. (Even though the pro picture doesn’t really have anything to do with your particular program!)
2. **Bathroom Stall Fliers:** A great way to reach a “captive audience!” If your club doesn’t have those Plexiglas flier holders attached to the inside of your bathroom stalls, see about doing this. The holders are clear Plexiglas, and attach with double-face adhesive tape which you can then slide in an 8 ½ x 11 inch full-page flier. Update these often and

highlight various events, clinics, lesson specials and other tennis programs. Make sure you put these in both the men's and women's restrooms.

3. **Coordinate with other programs:** If you have a swim program, work with the swim director and offer a combination swim & tennis program. Or, have a half-price group tennis lesson offered to all the swimming participants. (And vice versa!)
4. **Work with your fitness Director:** Try to have fliers available for hand out after popular aerobic classes. You can reciprocate by handing out personal training cards or info at your own tennis classes, emphasizing the importance of improving strength and conditioning through such programs for their tennis improvement.
5. **Work with area food and retail shops:** When ever you offer free food, be it fruit, finger-foods, drinks and the like, you will be offering more value to your tennis participants. Reciprocate with the vendors by handing out their fliers, coupons, discount offers and other info. I attribute the success of several of our programs—at least in part—to this type of synergistic cooperation with area businesses.
6. **Offer Free ½ hour clinic for all League Participants:** By offering a free “warm-up” clinic before each league match, you offer greater value for those playing in your league. It is a great social and physically helpful time that players often appreciate and makes them want to come back again. It is also a terrific way to stay “in touch” with your members and guests who are in your league.
7. **Offer a free Drawing at clinics:** Work with your pro shop or a racquet manufacturer to offer a nice “Participation Gift” to someone at each clinic. As your clinic numbers grow, you can increase the value of such a gift. Have the drawing at the end of each clinic which adds to the anticipation of the prize during the clinic. This is another way to provide value and fun to your participants.
  - a. **Working with Racquet Manufacturers:** All the major racquet companies are more than willing to help you with growing the game. In most cases, the area representatives for various racquet companies can provide you a box of prizes on a periodic basis for free or a nominal charge. From tee-shirts to sweatbands, from key chains to Frisbee's, most companies have a variety of low-cost or free prizes (that, of course, promote their products!), but that most tennis players enjoy getting...especially for free!
8. **Create a Newsletter:** One of the common elements among successful tennis facilities is the opportunity to connect and communicate with members and participants regularly. A monthly newsletter is a great way to do this; it helps communicate upcoming programs, highlight players and events, share tennis tips and strategy ideas, and include coupons or discounts to clinics or items in a pro shop or other marketing ideas.
9. **Ladder Programs:** Most players enjoy having goals of moving up a ladder. Most juniors and a great many adults will participate in ladder programs. (See **Chapter 3 and 11** for more information about Ladder Programs.)
10. **Newspaper Announcements:** Most local newspapers have an events section that offer community members information about local events. Most have various stipulations on such events, (either they must be free events or charge a minimal price or must be non-profit), but you should check and see if any of your tennis programs can be included in such announcements.
11. **Corporate Competitions:** Contact some of the larger businesses in your town to set up a Corporate Challenge. It works well when you get similar businesses pitted against each

other, creating a tennis challenge between like businesses. Car dealerships are usually great to contact; restaurants, cell-phone business, retail stores, box stores, hospitals, etc., all can be great seeds for creating more participation by offering various competitive and learning programs for such groups.

- a. It is advisable to include several free clinics: Strategy, etiquette and tennis skills should be covered as many people in these companies may not have played in years or may have very limited tennis experience at all. By offering free clinics teaching most of the general elements of playing and keeping score and basic doubles strategies, you will be far more successful in getting more players involved in these programs.

As you can see, there are many ways to market your tennis program and attract members to your club. (Be sure to review **Chapter 3** for more ideas too!) There are many other programming ideas that you can discover. Check out other tennis clubs either in your own area or when you might be traveling to other areas. Look on-line for tennis facilities and see what they are offering.

## Tennis Programming

There are countless programs that a tennis teaching professional can draw from to include in his or her club tennis programming. These can be broken down to two distinct categories: On-going Programs and Special Event or Periodic Programs.

### On-going Programs

These are your ‘bread and butter’ of your tennis program. While you will have a number of events that you don’t change, there will be a number of programs that will draw excellent numbers and players will not want you to change. The secret is to find what programs are most popular along with the times, days, and specific levels you want to attract. These on-going programs can include:

- Daily “Drop-In” Clinics
- Doubles and Singles Strategy Clinics
- Women’s Clinics
- Men’s Clinics
- Cardio Tennis ® clinics
- Junior Programs
- Evening Clinics
- Live Ball Clinics
- FREE Clinics

**Drop-In Clinics:** These can be your most popular clinics as they provide flexibility for your students. They don’t have to commit to a specific day or time, nor do they have to pay for a set-number of clinics ahead of time and risk not being able to attend one or more.

I find offering these clinics Tuesday’s and Thursdays or Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays works well. However, my largest average class is always Saturday morning in a drop-in clinic that preceded our Super Saturday Tournaments. In fact, I would run a clinic for half price for ladies before their women’s league events and would get large numbers of ladies

participating. The key is to find ways to offer a clinic that provides not only instructional elements, but also provides a comprehensive warm-up for players who will be participating in a following tennis competition or event.

### **Doubles and Singles Strategy-specific Clinics**

Everyone has a favorite tennis game, be it doubles or singles. Offering specific clinics that teach both stroke and strategy-specific elements can be very popular. I offer periodic FREE doubles etiquette clinics to train all players in proper doubles etiquette and other appropriate elements of doubles play. This helps tremendously in increasing participation in doubles leagues, tournaments and events because the players are more knowledgeable and comfortable in the social and competitive aspects of doubles when they understand this part of tennis better.

### **Women's Only Clinic**

Women, perhaps more than men, enjoy the concept of a gender-specific clinic. Women can feel intimidated by having men in a clinic and might elect not to attend a dual-sex clinic. By offering a women's only clinic, you appeal to those women who don't necessarily feel comfortable around a bunch of guys.

If you have a pro shop with clothing and other accessories, it is a great idea to host a "Fashion Show, Demo Day" clinic for women, offering a discount on women's clothing, racquets, bags, etc. and have a few of your women members "model" some of the more recent fashions you have available. Provide fresh fruit and or drinks and make a fun two-hour day of tennis and fashion. Women are more apt to purchase items when they are having a great time before, during and after such a clinic!

### **Men's Only Clinic**

On a different level than women, men often prefer attending a "men's only" clinic, a chance for them to not necessarily 'watch their tongue' or risk nailing a put-away at a woman. In addition, men can enjoy being very competitive in a men's-only clinic, something that is not as kosher in mixed clinics and in hitting games. The men can take to each other in a testosterone-driven, ego-building, aggressive mindset.

### **Cardio Tennis ®**

The tennis industry is taking a cue from the fitness industry in the development and marketing of a cardio-specific workout, one geared not to stroke improvement, necessarily, but to build a player's cardio endurance similar to the very popular aerobic classes that most fitness clubs offer. Similar to kick-boxing, power pump, and other high-energy fitness classes—as well as the popular "Spin" classes—Cardio Tennis is set to high-energy music, and requires an equally high-energy pro to motivate their students.

There are specific drills and patterns and progressions that are recommended for these programs. There is even a certification program that teaches and tests a pro's ability to conduct such programs. You can learn all about Cardio Tennis at [www.cardiotennis.com](http://www.cardiotennis.com).

### **Junior Programs**

Junior clinics are often the mainstay of good tennis clubs and programs. Kids take far more lessons than adults and are usually interested in a wide range of junior programs: from camps to private lessons, from group clinics to junior ladder competition, a club that is not

building a growing and thriving junior program will usually die within a year. There are many programs that you can offer to juniors in your area. And there are ways to use your existing junior program to entice new kids to join.

1. **“TEAM Clinics”**: Perhaps the most popular kids program is the Junior group or “team” clinic. (I like to call all my junior group lessons a “team” lesson as it draws on the typical kid’s desire to be part of a TEAM.) These clinics can be age specific, ability specific, sex-specific, and time specific. (Time used here refers to the length of time the clinic lasts; from a half-hour clinic to two hours or more are examples of time specific clinics.)

In addition, you can offer an “open” junior clinic where all ages and abilities show up, you have several pro-assistants, and you break the clinic up after some “team” elements. (Please read **Chapters 10 and 11** for more Team concepts.)
2. **Clinic & Challenge Sessions**: These are short drill programs followed by Challenge Ladder match play. If you have a junior ladder program, you can increase the participation of your juniors by creating a program that includes challenges. Treat this like you would a high school tennis team by bringing out your ladder and concluding each session with ladder position changes. This motivates the kids to want to improve when they have “peer pressure” pressing them to get better or end up lower on the ladder.
  - a. Remember that you might lose a few kids out of this program who don’t do well in competition or end up losing a few matches and are not mature enough to handle the lose. However, if you provide programs that offer an alternative for these kids, you will retain most of the kids that enter your junior program.
3. **Junior “Live Ball”**: These are “Games Based” clinics that offer little instruction but a lot of games and hitting opportunities. (Please see Live Ball Clinics that will be discussed in a moment.)
4. **Junior “Nights of Fun”**: These are very popular ways to increase your junior participation. We offered each season a different night: **Marathon Live Ball Night**, (three hours of different live-ball games where the players were grouped into teams and each game players earn points for their team...a winning team is crowned based on points accumulated.); **Survivor Night**: a series of ‘survivor’ skills that each team competed in. (From having to defrost a tee-shirt that is frozen in a block of ice to teams having to complete a treasure hunt or trivia quiz or other competitive event.); **Tennis & Movie Night**: Tennis followed by a movie shown on the tennis court...bring your own bean bag chair!; **Scavenger Hunt & Hide and Seek Night**: After our club closed, we would have different scavenger hunt challenges and team “high and seek”.

### **Evening Programs**

Many tennis players prefer—or can only play—at night. There is a different social and competitive mindset at night, for some reason. Evening programs can include:

- Men’s Night
- Women’s Night
- Couples or Mixed Night

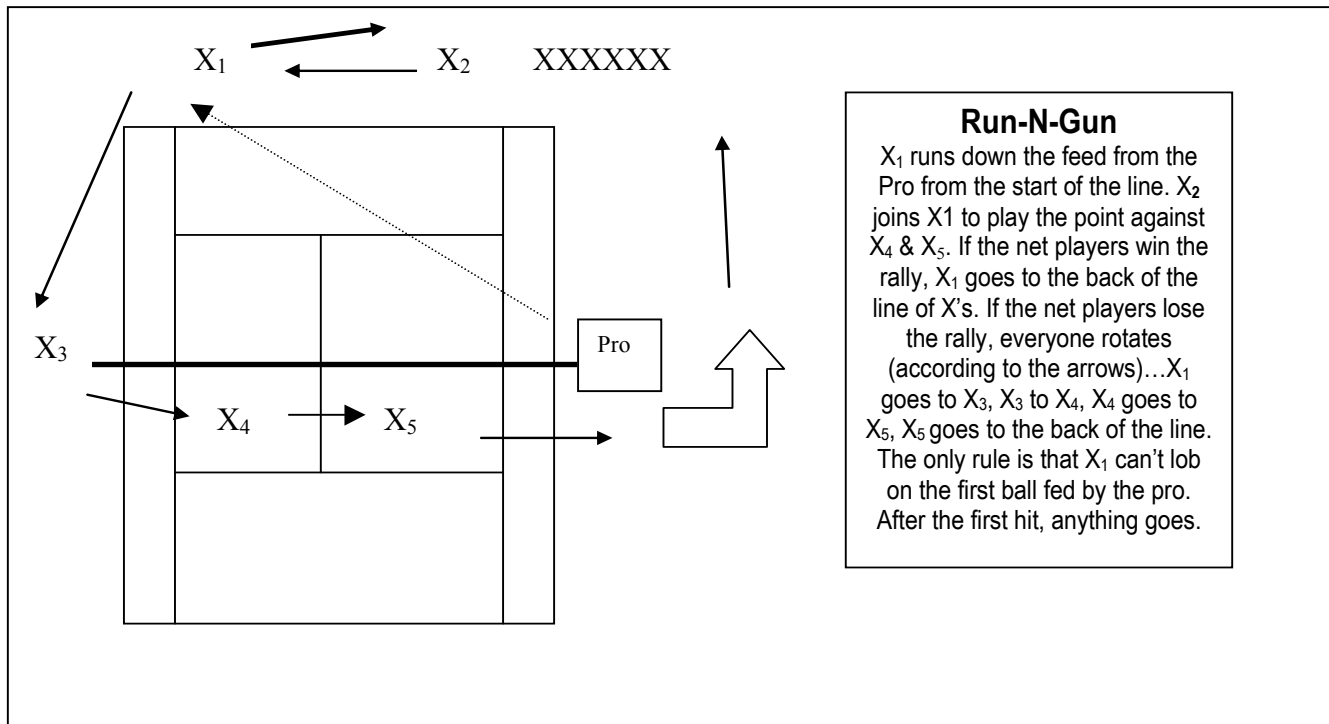
- Family Night
- Corporate Challenge Night
- Singles Night (Play not marital status!)
- Singles Night (Marital status, not type of play!)
- Doubles Night
- Live Ball Night

Obviously, there are a wide variety of evening programs that can address and target specific groups. The more creative you can be, the more likely you will keep players interested in coming to your programs.

### **Live Ball Clinics**

As mentioned earlier, Live Ball Clinics are “games based” tennis games that don’t feature a lot of instruction—if any at all. Many people simply like to hit tennis balls without thinking about instructional considerations each hit. Live Ball games can include the following:

- **21:** This is a game between two groups on each side of the court; two lines of players are at the back fence on each side with two players paired up at the baseline. The pro alternately feeds a ball to one of the players from the side of the court near the net post and the players play out the point among the four. (Simulating a doubles point.) Each rally is worth one point with the exception of a “Clean Volley” winner (a volley that is not touched by either opponent), which is worth five points. (This bonus encourages players to get to the net!) When one team gets to 11 points, the teams switch sides of the court. (The pro would now be feeding balls to the other team for the remainder of the game.)
- **Run-N-Gun:** A great game for a large group and is very fast moving. The game is played with a group of players at the baseline off to the side of the court. Another player is stationed at the opposite net post; two players at the net on the opposite side of the court as the group of players; the pro feeding at the other net post. The pro starts the point by feeding a ball towards the far side of the court as to where the group of players is at the baseline. The first player runs down the ball and hits it towards the two players at the net. The second player in the line also takes the court with the player who first ran down the pro’s feed. The two at the baseline play the point out with the two at the net. If the net team loses the point, everyone rotates one position: the first player from the group goes to the net post to wait; the net post person fills into the vacant net position as the net players rotate towards the pro, with the one closest to the pro rotating around the pro to the back of the line. If the baseline players lose the point, the first player who started the rally must go to the back of the line of players. The second player becomes the run-N-gun player on the next rally.



- Fast-Hands Olympic Tennis:** this popular game pits four players at the net. The pro feeds from behind the service line to the two players at the opposite side of the net. (The feed should be dependent on the level of players: Lower balls for advanced players, higher for intermediate.) All four players must start on the service line as the ball is fed into play. Only then can the players move in. The game is played with the pro feeding alternately to each of the far players, one ball each for each rally. If the two teams split the two rallies, then the pro feeds a “Tie Breaker” ball down the middle of the far team. If the far team wins two out of three rallies, then they come over to the other side of the net where the pro is feeding. If the team on the far side of the pro loses two of the three rallies, they must go back to the back of the line, (and switch lines), and the next team is the challenging team. The first team to win 6 consecutive 2-of-3 point rallies while on the side of the net where the pro is wins the set. (This can be changed to 3 or 4 points dependent on skill levels.)
- Ring-Ring:** Another very popular game among clubs around the country: this singles game features one player on the far side of the net at the baseline, one at the opposite baseline and the pro feeds from off the side of the court. (Extra players are along the back fence where the pro is feeding from.) The pro feeds the ball to the one player who plays out the point with his opponent. After each rally, the player with the extra players on his team goes to the back of the line, keeping track if he won the rally or not. When a player wins two rallies against the single player, he yells, “Ring Ring” which signifies that he has two points. If that person with Ring-Ring wins the point, he takes over for the individual player who then comes to the other side of the court to the back of the line. If

the player with Ring-Ring loses the point, they lose their two 'ring-ring' points and starts back at zero points won.

- **Olympic Tennis:** Similar to "Fast Hands Olympic Tennis", this doubles drill features two players at the net on the side of the pro who feeds from the middle between the two net players. The pro feeds the ball deep to two players on the baseline and the four players play the point out. (No lobs are allowed in this game, although, the pro can feed from the side of the court and then you can allow lobs.) The baseline players must win two of the three rallies in order to take over the net position on the opposite side. First team to win 6 "games" (each two-of-three point rallies is one game), wins the set.
- **Round the World:** This game pits two even lines of players at the baseline on opposite sides of the court. The pro, feeding from the side of the court puts the ball in play. The ball is hit by the first player to the other player and quickly runs around the court to joint the players in line on the opposite side of the court. The players keep the ball in play and each player must run to the other side of the court to the other line after each hit. If a player misses, they are out and the game starts again with one fewer players. This continues until you have only one player on each side. Instead of running around the court at this point, the player must hit the ball, set the racquet down, turn a 360 degree circle then pick up the racquet and hit the next ball. The last player to not miss wins.
- **Run down the Lob:** Two players at each baseline, the pro at the baseline between the two lines of players on his side. (Only two players on the far side.) The pro feeds the ball to the far players who then play the point out with the two on the pro's side of the court. If the far team wins, they move to the net for the start of the next point against the next two players in line by the pro. If the net team wins the point at the net, they stay in against each following team. If the net team loses the point, they are out and the pro feeds a very high lob which the two players who were on the pro's side of the net must run around the net posts and run down the lob and return it playing the point against the next two players in line by the pro. These two players who are now next to the pro should move to the net when the two other players are trying to run down the lob. Game can be called when the net team wins three or more rallies while at the net.

There are numerous other games that you can think of or read about in various resources. The USTA has complete books on various drills and games for appropriate age groups. I have included my favorite drills which always prove to be fun for the players and provide for good strategic practice.