

A LOVE LETTER for PARENTS Tips for Developing Our Future Champs

TO: Parents and Community Tennis Friends

FROM: Bob Love USPTA (Master Pro)

RE: Tips for working with novice tennis students

BALL: A Transitional Ball (WILSON “EZ Play Ball”, “CHAMPS” or PENN “STARS” balls.)

PURPOSE: These are some activities you can do or supervise for your children so they can develop basic tennis skills. The three basic skills are as follows:

1. **TRACKING**—following the ball with one’s eyes.
 2. **MOVEMENT**—moving to the ball and getting ready to stroke it.
 3. **FORM**—stroking through the ball and finishing properly. **MAINTAIN BALANCE!**
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RACKET SKILLS: Beginners need to “feel” the interaction of the racket and the ball so these several “TAP” DRILLS will help them. These are easy to do at home.

TAP DOWNS: Putting a FOREHAND GRIP on the racket, turn the racket face down and tap the ball several times. We started with three times and catch, five times and catch, then ten times and catch. The FUN drill is to tap the ball down while walking along a sidewalk or even a line on a tennis court. NOTE: This IS tiring for your child so DO NOT see “HOW MANY?” the child can do! The strain on the wrist might lead to unneeded pain.

TAP UPS: Same as above except the ball is being gently tapped up from the racket face. Keep the progressions the same as TAP DOWNS.

COMBOS (“FLIPS”): Tap the ball UP and after it bounces, TAP it DOWN and then repeat. This is a BASIC demonstration of racket control that EVERY CHILD should be able to do.

CATCHING SKILLS: These are a series of partnership skills that are REALLY valuable for beginners. They involve two folks working together learning to track the ball and move their feet.

DRILL 1: Two students get about 10 or more feet apart and one gently throws the ball underhand to the other. (FIGURE 1). The receiver WAITS until the ball hits the ground and then moves (USING AT LEAST THREE STEPS) and catches the ball with BOTH hands (FIGURE 2). NOTE: It is important to catch the ball with two hands as we want to promote BALANCE. TO PROGRESS, catch in RIGHT then LEFT hands)

DRILL 2: MOVE CLOSER TOGETHER (FIG. 3) to shorten the response time. The catcher should grab the ball ON THE WAY UP! (FIG. 4)



FIG.1: Preparing for the underhand toss from waist level



FIG. 2: After the catch. NOTE: BOTH hands and eyes ON THE BALL!



FIG. 3: Move closer together.



FIG. 4: Catch the ball on the way UP!

DRILL 3: Use “*sewing-machine*”, quick-tapping feet before the ball is even thrown and move to the ball to catch with both hands. Toss to BOTH sides to create basic PIVOTING movements.

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HITTING WALL DRILLS: NOTE: USE TRANSITIONAL ball for these drills.

A foam ball could be used indoors. The ball must be small enough to catch.

DRILL 4: TOSS AND CATCH. Starting a few feet from the wall, do “sewing-machine”, tippy-tap footwork, toss ball softly at the wall (FIG. 5) and then catch it in both hands **KEEPING THE BALL IN FRONT OF THE BODY** (FIG. 6). **MOVE BACK** as your skill increases.



FIG. 4: Gently toss the ball at the wall and keep feet moving.



FIG. 5: Focus on the ball
And catch with both hands.

DRILL 5: TOSS AND CATCH IN RACKET HAND. Toss the ball gently at the wall and **AFTER IT HITS THE WALL**, move your feet at least three times and **THEN** catch it in the racket hand.

DRILL 6: RACKET TAP DRILL. Stand a few feet from the wall. Use “sewing-machine” feet and tap the ball into the wall. Try for ten consecutive taps.

DRILL 7: MINI-STROKE DRILL. Same as DRILL 6 except **FINISH WITH THE RACKET VERTICAL** (*straight up*).

DRILL 8: THREE STEPS, STROKE, AND CATCH DRILL. Using the three step sequence, take three steps, stroke, and catch the ball.

STARTING POSITION: At least 15 feet from the wall. (For right-hander)

(Fig. 6) **STEP 1:** With your left foot, step **TOWARDS** the spot you want to contact the ball.

(Fig. 7) **STEP 2:** Step **AT** the contact point with your right foot and take your racket back.

(Fig. 8) **STEP 3:** With the left foot, step **NEXT** to the contact point and prepare to drop the ball.

STEP 4: Rotate hips, gently stroke a forehand toward the wall and transfer the racket to the non-racket hand.

(Fig. 9) **STEP 5:** Catch the ball in your racket hand and have your body in a balanced position.



FIG. 6: Step **AT** contact point with left foot.

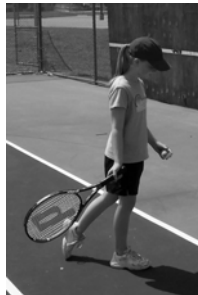


FIG. 7: Step and take racket back.



FIG. 8: Step **NEXT** to contact point and prepare to drop ball.



FIG. 9: Transfer the racket to left hand and catch the ball with racket hand.