

# 33 hits in 45 minutes

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# Purpose of the Following Comments

The following comments provide a snapshot of segments of a recreation tennis program.

The pictures have been compiled for the sole purpose of generating discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the way recreational tennis programs (and recreational sports) are taught.

This presentation focuses on areas of where the program could be improved. It is important to note that there were a number of instances where the coaches performed admirably. Many of the challenges faced by the instructors are a result of the sponsoring recreation department.

The intent of this presentation is to encourage coaches and parents to provide input to their club and recreation sports directors as a way of improving the quality of instruction and motivating youth to stay active in sports.

# Topics Covered

Each section provides comments and photos about program experiences and observations

- Registration/Program Information
- Practice Sessions
  - Advanced Group
  - Younger Players
  - 33
- Match Play and Staff
- Program Evaluation
- Overall Perception of Program

# Registration/Program Information

# Registration/Program Information

The following documents our family's initial experience with the program.

- In March we registered two daughters in the 10&U division that was scheduled to begin in June.
- There was not communication from the recreation department regarding the program prior to the first session. The recreation staff did not provide us any program information nor did they distribute an e-mail reminder, even though there was a gap of over two months between the registration date and the first date of the session.
- We were not able to attend Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday of the first week and the recreation department did not contact us to see if there was a problem.
- We were aware that Friday was match day so we checked the recreation department website to see if we could find additional information. The website had a schedule from the previous season.
- We showed up on Friday to participate in the first match and were told that we could not participate because the staff didn't know we were coming. The staff indicated they could not work us into the play.
- We left our email with the staff person and asked them to contact us.
- The following week the staff had not contacted us so we contacted the director of the program. Only then did the coach contact us.
- From that point on, the coach provided excellent communications.

**COMMUNICATIONS IS CRITICAL IN ANY RECREATION PROGRAM, PARTICULARLY THOSE INVOLVING ENTRY LEVEL PLAYERS.**

# Practice Sessions

# Practice Sessions

The following pictures were taken on the day the program distributed their team t-shirts.

One group of photos were taken during the last 20 minutes of an “advanced” group, while the second set were taken during the 45-minute session for the 10 and U group.

# Advanced Group – Court 1



The 16 person at the net volley drill.

Court 1 had 2 instructors and 16 players.



# Advanced Group – Court 2



Court 2 had 2 instructors and 14 players.

# Advanced Group – Court 3



The playing ability of the players on court 3 was better. They were rewarded by having only 6 players on the court.

# Advanced Group – Court 4



There are enough players (22) on court 4 to run a football scrimmage, with a full squad on offense and defense.

# Questions Raised About the Advanced Session

After watching 4 instructors work with 58 kids on 4 courts for 20 minutes in the advanced session, the following questions came to mind:

- How can safety be regarded as a priority?
- How can instruction of basic skills, etiquette, and rules be regarded as a priority?
- How can recreation programs generate interest in tennis when most of the court time is spent standing in line – this a major concern in a society plagued by instant gratification and childhood obesity?
- What is the attrition rate of the program?

# 10 and Under Players

The following slides show the younger groups of players. Their session was 45 minutes long. The number of touches per player was limited; however, the lesson plan was reasonable:

- 15 minutes of groundstrokes
- 15 minutes of serving
- 15 minutes of games

# 10 & U Groundstrokes– Court 1



# 10 & U Groundstrokes– Court 2



Court 2 had 2 instructors and 9 players.

# 10 & U Groundstrokes - Court 3

Court 3 had 1 instructor and 8 players.





# 10 & U Groundstrokes – Court 4

Court 4 had 1 instructor and 8 players.



# Additional Observation on Groundstrokes



Court 4 had 1 instructor and 8 players.

These 6 students were bored to death and not engaged. Can you blame them?

# Comments About the Groundstrokes Drills in the Previous Slides

- From a safety perspective the players are positioned to minimize a player being inadvertently injured.
- After one round of hitting groundstrokes, the drill deteriorated. The student hitting the ball is semi-engaged, the “on-deck” hitter is politely watching and the other six players are standing and in a circle talking in the background.
- The drill required each player to hit a forehand and a backhand. Depending on the amount of time the instructor spent providing tips, each person spent about 20 seconds hitting and receiving feedback and 140 seconds standing in line in the hot sun. During the 15 minute groundstroke session players would, on average, hit 10-12 balls.

# 10 & U - Serving

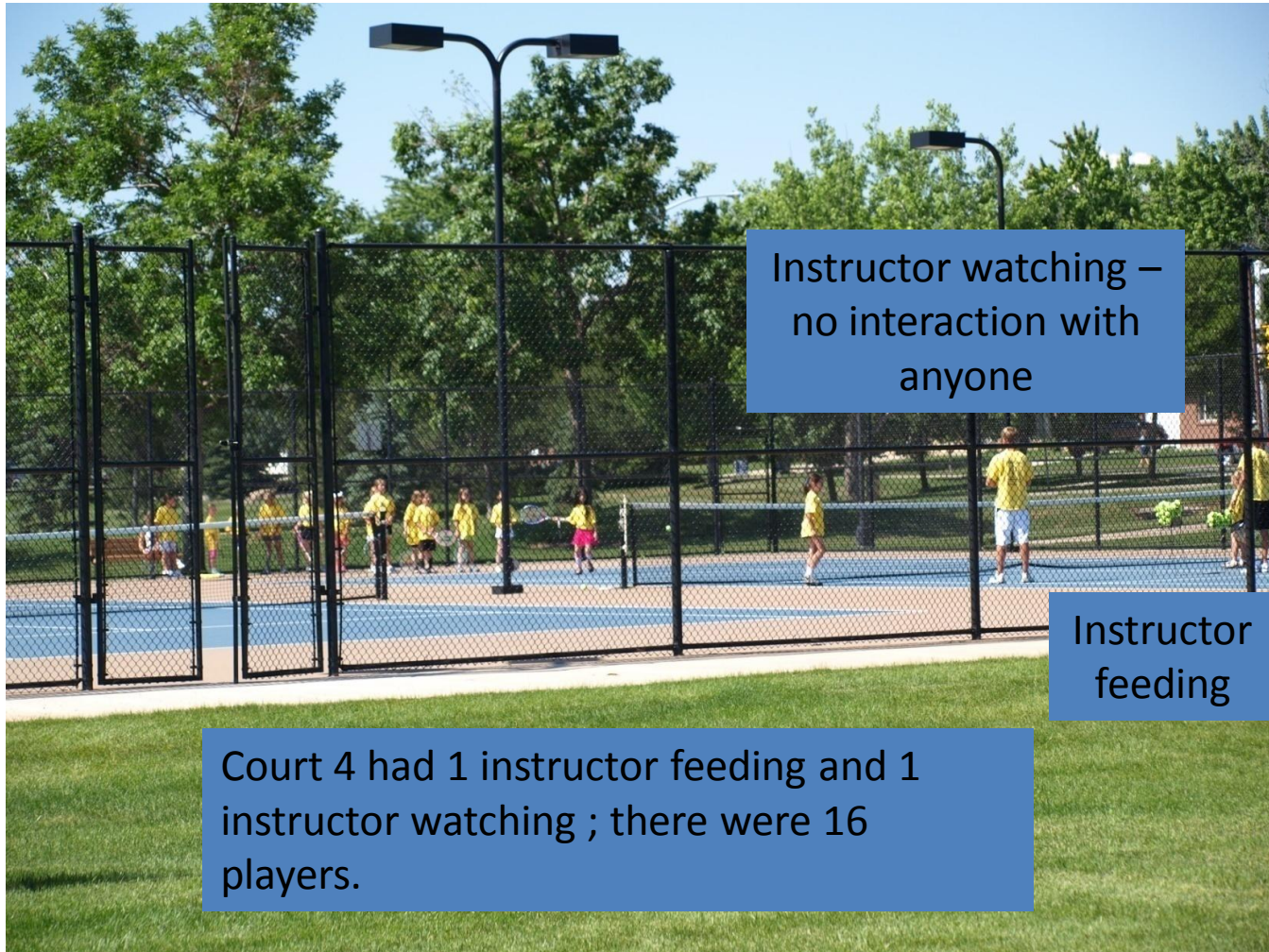
Court 2 had 1 instructor and 10 players.



# Comments About the Serving Drills from the Previous Slide

- The hopper of balls was placed 8-10 feet behind the service line for safety reasons. Nevertheless, 10 people, plus 1 instructor occupied an area of 150 to 200 square feet while students were practicing their serves. This is tight; however, there were no injuries.
- During the 15 minute serving segment of the lesson, the participants hit about 2 hoppers full of balls. The time was split between hitting and retrieving balls. Assuming the hoppers held 75 balls, this means the 10 students hit a total of about 150 balls. This equates to 1 ball a minute or an average of 15 serves per student for this segment of the lesson.

# 10 & U - Games



Instructor watching –  
no interaction with  
anyone

Instructor  
feeding

Court 4 had 1 instructor feeding and 1  
instructor watching ; there were 16  
players.

# Comments About the Games in the Previous Slide

- The group on court 3 was very lethargic, so the instructor combined them with the group on court 4 to play “Jail,” a popular group game.
- The instructor-to-student ratio went from 1-to-8, to 1-to-16 as the court 3 instructor did nothing but watch. Essentially, the number of balls hit per student was cut in half.
- Overall, a player hit a ball every 10-15 seconds, i.e. the students hit a total of 60-90 balls during the 15 minute game period, or 4-6 balls on average. Because Jail is an elimination game, some students hit more and some hit less.

# THIRTY-THREE

For the observed lesson, described in the previous slides, the students hit an average of 33 balls during their 45 minute period on the court.



# Opportunities for Practice Sessions

- Increase the number of touches.
- Increase the activity level of students
- Include all students in the drills as a way of helping them learn skills.
- Reduce the class size to improve safety and improve the quality of instruction.
- It is not satisfactory to teach tennis the way it was taught 40 years ago. Integrate teaching techniques that have been introduced to the sport over the past 20 years, such as Little Tennis, Quick Start Tennis.

# Match Play and Staff

# Match Play

- The most valuable component of the program is the match play.
- The majority of younger players are not capable of playing matches, i.e. they are 10 & U and do not know where to stand or how to hit serves and returns.
- The coaches spent too much time trying to customize matches for parents and players - unfortunately, the parents did not show similar dedication and the schedule had to be re-arranged on game day, because players dropped out unannounced.
- At the younger levels, 10 & U and 12 & U, the players should be given a designated time to play every week, for example from 8 until 9:30 or 10:00. They will be assigned matches on a first come basis and play a total of 6 games. Once those games were over they would wait for another match to be played.
- Travel should be eliminated for the younger or weaker players, with the exception of the state tournament. It is not necessary for the players to travel, when they don't know how to keep score or where to stand.
- Allow the parents to "monitor" the matches, much the same as the USTA officials monitor college matches. Parent would be allowed to help the players with the score or on-court positioning.
- Supposedly there were 40 players enrolled in the 10 & U program at the local site. Only two of these players enrolled in the local novice USTA tournament at the same location (the week after the recreation program ended). The recreation program should be a feeder program for USTA novice tournaments.

# Staff

- Staff members were passionate about the sport and the kids.
- The coaching staff members I encountered, both local and other areas, appeared to be competent, i.e. their tennis skills were more than sufficient to instruct in the program.
- Only one local instructor did a mediocre job coaching during match play. For this instructor, texting and talking on the cell phone were more important than coaching the students.
- The local coaching staff held a pot luck for the local players after the season was over. They provided “fun certificates” for players in attendance. This was a nice touch.

# Opportunities for Staff and Match Play

- Integrate Little Tennis or other entry level programs into match play.
- Increase program retention through improved match play.
- Increase environmental responsibility by eliminating unnecessary play for players who play below a certain level.
- Put basic rules on the recreation websites – how to score, where to stand, etc.
- Provide parents with a guideline of the skills each age group should have.
- The recreation program has an opportunity to serve as a feeder program for other tournaments and recreation programs.

# Program Evaluation

# Program Evaluation from Local Recreation Department

## Youth Sports Program Evaluation

Thank you for participating in the xxxx recreational youth sports program. Please take a moment to complete this survey. We appreciate your input. It will be used to improve the program for the future.

Sport \_\_ CARA Tennis team \_\_\_\_\_

Age Group \_\_\_\_\_

How did you learn about this program? \_\_\_ Recreation Brochure \_\_\_ Newspaper \_\_\_ Website \_\_\_ Friend \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Opinions about the program	Please Rate					Comments
	Poor 1	Fair 2	Average 3	Above Average 4	Excellent 5	
Program registration process	1	2	3	4	5	
Satisfaction of facilities	1	2	3	4	5	
Cost of program was appropriate	1	2	3	4	5	
Registered participant had fun	1	2	3	4	5	
Registered participant had an overall positive experience	1	2	3	4	5	
Participant's main coach had knowledge of tennis and was able to demonstrate and teach to the participant	1	2	3	4	5	
Participants main coach had a positive attitude	1	2	3	4	5	
Overall view of the coaching staff	1	2	3	4	5	
Overall satisfaction of the program	1	2	3	4	5	

What, if anything, was the participant's favorite part of tennis?

What, if anything, would the participant like to see in the future?

What, if anything, would you like to see in the future for tennis?

Do you anticipate registering for next year's program? Y / N

Please feel free to write comments, concerns or suggestions on the back. THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

# Comments on Program Evaluation

The local recreation department sent parents of program participants an e-mail in mid-August with a program evaluation attached (see previous slide). Given the weakness of the survey instrument and the lack of timeliness in delivering the survey, it is unlikely that the program will gather any meaningful feedback about the program.



# Opportunities for Program Evaluation

An effective survey instrument could include a few of the questions asked in the survey. Other suggested topics include satisfaction with:

- Program safety
- Appropriateness/value of travel for matches
- Teaching of skills
- Teaching of rules, positioning, and strategy
- Teaching of etiquette
- Student/teacher ratio

An effective survey should be delivered near the end of the program and include a significant number of participating parents. The survey could either be conducted on-line or with a paper survey at one of the final events.

# Overall Perception of 2009 Recreation Tennis Program

# Perception of 2009 Recreation Tennis Program

The following things stand out about the program:

- Most of the on-court staff are very passionate about tennis and the kids they coached. Give them the tools to make the program a first-class entry level program.
- The strength of the program is providing match play for juniors.
- Despite the many positives associated with the program, the recreation program probably has a negative impact on the sport of tennis, i.e. more kids are turned off to the sport than stay with the sport.
- Said differently, it is my impression that the juniors who participated in the state tournament are excited about tennis. It is my belief that more juniors dropped out of the program than attended the state tournament.
- Our children survived the program because they missed three weeks of the T-W-Th practice sessions while attending other sports camps (Monday through Thursday). Fortunately, they were allowed to participate in matches on those weeks and they benefitted from them.
- The recreation program should be able to have a more positive impact on the juniors and the sport of tennis by making changes in the following areas:
  - Revisions to the practice session (instructional) program
  - Revamp the match play structure for younger players
  - Improved communication and program evaluation
  - Strengthen ties to other club and association programs, such as USTA tournaments.These changes can be made without compromising the “recreation” focus of the program.

# 2011 Update

In 2011, the documented that the recreation program leaders had worked with a local USPTA professional and incorporated Quick Start tennis to improve the program.