

# 10 AND UNDER TENNIS

**A PARENTS GUIDE**





## Chapter 1: Introduction

Parents want to do what is best for their children. They want to provide meaningful and positive experiences that will be enjoyable and lead to the positive development of the child. Tennis is a sport that a child can learn at a young age and enjoy with friends and family for a lifetime. This guide will provide you with the right tools to get your child started correctly, keeping the focus on the fun, active and lifelong benefits of tennis.

### Goals

It is important to keep participation in youth sports in perspective and to understand why kids play. Many times adults have grand ideas of a professional career or even a college scholarship. While these could be long-term goals for those players who eventually specialize in a sport, children play for different reasons. They want to be active, be with friends, develop skills and, most importantly, have fun.

As parents, one of the most important things you can do is to help your children discover their interests and provide experiences that develop a love of the game. For new players it is not about winning, rankings and trophies, but playing, being with their friends, making new friends, being active and developing their skills. It might be participating on a team and having pizza after a match or practice. It might be going to a local college match or taking a trip with mom and dad to a professional tournament.

## What's the key for my child developing a love of the game?

When 28,000 boys and girls were asked in a study about why they played sports, the top answer was "fun" followed by "to do something I am good at" and "to improve my skills." "Winning" did not even make the Top 10!

To be a great player there must be an internal commitment required to do the necessary work to improve skills and conditioning. However, if the love of tennis does not burn deep inside your child first, burnout and dissatisfaction will probably accompany the inevitable plateaus on the quest for improvement and long-time participation.

What's the key for my child developing a love of the game?

Parents of players of all ages must keep both long- and short-term goals in perspective. The important short-term goal of fun and activity must be emphasized above all. If tennis is not fun, or if there is

little activity, your child is unlikely to develop a love of the game and will instead find another activity that is more compelling.

Long-term goals include the enjoyment of an activity they can play for a lifetime. It is a game kids can play with friends and family. Tennis is a fantastic way to spend quality time as a family.

Be aware of putting pressure on children for results, but make sure you recognize and acknowledge effort. In this country, 70 percent of kids quit organized sport by the age of 13, and the top three reasons given by kids are:

1. It's not fun anymore
2. Parental pressure to perform
3. Unmet coaching expectations

Parents must let kids be kids and let them play and discover. Let them have fun. Provide opportunities for them to be with friends. Permit them to play spontaneously, to experiment and to risk. Allow them to challenge each other to learn new skills and try new shots. Make tennis that haven where they can get away from their over-structured lives and learn to move, play and create on the tennis court.

Research indicates that kids develop personal motivation and a love of the game when they are given ample opportunity to participate in unstructured free play. Taking charge of their playing environment and recognizing for themselves what effort is needed to excel is the basis for personal drive and motivation.





## Chapter 2: The Benefits of Tennis

Tennis is one of the most popular sports in the United States and is the second most-played sport worldwide. Free or low-cost courts are available in nearly every community at schools and parks, and organized programs for kids are common throughout the country. All a child needs to get started is a racquet and some tennis balls. The cost of an introductory racquet and balls is extremely reasonable so the starting expense of playing tennis is among the lowest of any sport.

### Getting Started

Your child has several options when they begin the sport. Tennis can be an individual sport and kids can develop, play and compete as an individual. There are ample opportunities to develop at their own pace and participate in events with other kids of similar ability levels in most areas. These opportunities extend to competition and tournament play at national and even international events for those desiring individual challenges as they develop their skills.

Tennis is also a great team game, and most children have great experiences being part of a team. Kids like to be with their friends and being on a team allows them to learn and play with their friends. Team practices and matches are beneficial in skill development and in learning how to compete in a team environment.



Kids also enjoy the simple activity of playing in the driveway or casually at parks and schools.

High school tennis for both boys and girls is one of the Top 10 participation sports in the country. Every year more than 370,000 high school players represent their schools as members of their high school teams. Roughly 15,000 of these players have the opportunity to play college varsity tennis. And more than 20,000 college players participate on teams at the club level through the USTA Tennis On Campus program, which is one of the fastest-growing programs for tennis players in the country.

### Kids also enjoy the simple activity of playing in the driveway or casually at parks and schools.

At younger ages, kids can find formal and informal team opportunities at elementary schools, middle schools and as part of USTA Jr. Team Tennis leagues throughout the country.



Tennis is one of the best games for the entire family. Parents can spend valuable and fun time on the courts with their children from a very young age all the way through the time their children have children of their own. Siblings often enjoy rallying with each other as well.

Research shows that tennis is also one of the best and most enjoyable ways to become healthy and fit. The very nature of the game of serving, returning and rallying makes tennis an active sport with plenty of movement, starts, stops and direction changes.

Tennis is a great cardiovascular activity and the movements used on the court develop balance, agility and coordination. Mental focus is sharpened because decision-making and concentration is necessary every time a ball is hit. It is also one of the safest of all sports and has a very low rate of injury compared to other youth sports.



## Chapter 3: Competition

At some time children will be on the court competing against another player or doubles team. Competition at the correct time will provide a focus to the game, bring an awareness of strengths and weaknesses, and sharpen skills and tactics. Competition will also provide valuable opportunities for your child to make decisions in real time.

On the other hand, competition too early can lead to discouragement, and the development of skills and tactics could be compromised if kids revert to bad habits for short-term success.

Competition for children 10 and under should be short in duration using modified scoring. Most other sports shorten the competition by reducing the number of innings or the time of the periods compared to adult competition. Playing a two-out-of-three set match makes little sense for young players. Short sets, no-ad scoring, tie-breaks and even timed matches are much more appropriate.

Parents should seek out events that provide young players ample opportunities to play with and against a large number of children instead of events that eliminate kids. These events for young children should last more than a half-day. Round robin events where everyone has a chance to play every player are good because nobody is eliminated and everyone plays the same amount. Compass draw events allow kids to move into the best competitive brackets and continue playing, win or lose.

These events should be the foundation for competitive play. Young and inexperienced players should avoid single-elimination tournaments where there is one winner and many losers. These tournaments generally have documented results that lead to standings or rankings. Competing in these events with poor results is very discouraging for young players. It is never fun to play and lose and have your name at the bottom of the ranking chart.

Remember, there are great variations in skeletal development in young children, and early developers have an advantage at the younger ages. The late bloomer will eventually catch up in strength and size if they are not discouraged and quit because of poor competitive results.

### **Short sets, no-ad scoring, tie-breaks...are appropriate.**

Competition in the right form is fun and challenging for young players. Kids will learn to compete if they are given many opportunities to play with and against a large number of players. Events such as festivals place kids on teams that compete in many different activities on the tennis court, including skills, fitness and movement activities, games and modified match play.

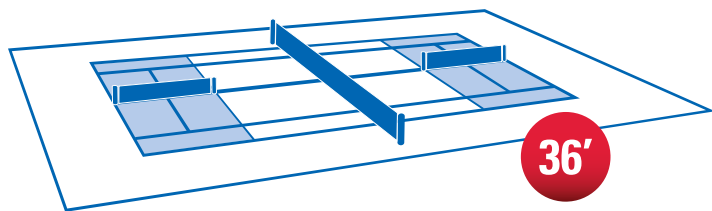




## Chapter 4: 10<sup>and</sup> Under Tennis and the QuickStart Tennis Play Format

QuickStart Tennis is an exciting new play format for learning and playing tennis. It is designed to bring kids to the game by utilizing smaller racquets, slower and lighter balls, shorter court dimensions and modified scoring, all tailored to the age and size of the child. It is divided into two different levels, ages 8 and under and ages 9-10.

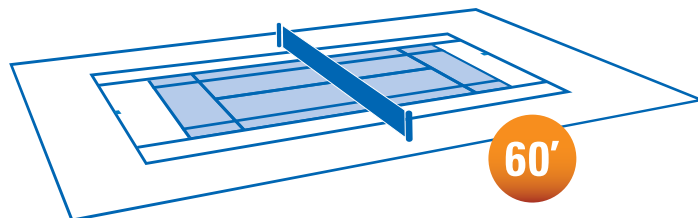
| Court Size | Racquet   | Ball   | Net Height |
|------------|-----------|--|------------|
| 36' x 18'  | up to 23" | A red foam or red low compression felt ball moves slower, bounces lower and travels less distance. | 2' 9"      |



For those children 8 and under, the size of the court is 36' x 18'. The setup divides a standard-sized court into several smaller courts, using the standard-sized court's doubles sidelines as baselines. Racquets are up to 23 inches in length so that every child can easily handle the equipment. The ball, a red foam or low compression ball, is lightweight, bounces lower and travel through the air slower. The net height is 2'9", making it easier for each child to rally over the net.



| Court Size        | Racquet   | Ball   | Net Height |
|-------------------|-----------|--|------------|
| 60' x 21' singles | up to 25" | An orange low compression felt ball moves a little faster and travels farther but still has a lower bounce than the yellow ball. | 3'         |
| 60' x 27' doubles |           |  |            |



For those children ages 9-10, the size of the court is 60' x 21' (60' x 27' for doubles). The racquets are up to 25 inches in length. A low compression orange ball is used. A low compression orange ball travels a little faster and farther than the red foam or felt balls but still has a lower bounce and travels slower than the standard yellow ball.

The QuickStart Tennis format works by getting kids into the game immediately. Within the first hour of stepping onto the court, many kids are actually able to play the game. Scaling the game down to their size helps make the learning process easier, a lot more fun and allows the child to play a scaled-down version of full court tennis.

The majority of youth sports have followed this progressive formula for years. Baseball begins with smaller bats and smaller fields. Basketball and soccer also employ shortened playing surfaces and appropriate-sized equipment. These modifications help ensure that your child's first experience in the sport will leave them overjoyed—not overwhelmed.

### The QuickStart Tennis format works by getting kids into the game immediately.

QuickStart Tennis enables kids to have more enjoyable experiences early on in the learning process. The more fun they have by being able to rally, the more they will play and the faster they will learn. The above charts illustrate all of the QuickStart Tennis Specifications.



## Chapter 5: Play Opportunities

There is a starting point for every child who is introduced to tennis. This could be in any number of settings—at school during physical education class, during recess, or in a before- or after-school program. Many youth program providers also offer tennis, generally in after-school or summer program. The first experience might be on a playground with friends or it may be in the driveway with a parent or family member. Plus, introductory tennis classes are common in most communities in the United States and are typically offered by parks, camps or clubs.

However it happens, once your child has that first experience and develops a perceived competence, the thought that, “Hey, I can do this,” it is important to identify opportunities for your child to participate. Listed below are several possibilities that are all great for kids.

### Spontaneous Play

An opportunity often overlooked in our highly scheduled society is spontaneous play. This is where kids can learn and play either by themselves or with other kids. It could be hitting balls against a wall or garage door, or by setting up modified courts that fit into smaller or more restricted spaces.

Kids in other youth sports shoot baskets, kick or throw balls in the backyard or skateboard down the sidewalk and off the curb. Playing tennis with foam balls on a modified court can provide endless hours of activity and fun. It is interesting to note that champions in many other sports spent most of their developmental years learning from others and playing spontaneously.

Previously this was difficult because kids only had options of playing on the same-sized court and with the same ball that the pros use. The QuickStart Tennis Play format uses equipment that



is scaled to the size of the child. Racquets are shorter, lighter and have smaller handles. Balls are softer, lighter, bounce lower and move slower through the air. Courts are smaller and the net is lower. This makes it possible for kids to learn by playing rather than having to learn all the strokes before they even play the game.

### Driveway Tennis

Smaller courts can be set up on driveways, parking lots, playgrounds, activity rooms, gymnasiums and even on tennis courts using sidewalk chalk for lines and a rope or “caution tape” as a net. Several manufacturers make pop-up nets that are portable and can easily be set up and disassembled.

## Hitting balls against a wall or garage door has a rich tradition in our sport.

The court will be much smaller than a regulation-sized court, so make the net lower and use a foam ball that has a restricted flight distance even when taking a full swing. This is an excellent way to get kids started, and players of all ages and abilities can have fun playing a scaled down version of tennis by using a soft and slow ball. Kids can play with their friends and parents will enjoy hitting balls with their children in this realistic yet modified tennis experience.

### Wall Tennis

Hitting balls against a wall or garage door has a rich tradition in our sport. Many champions have grooved their strokes by hitting balls against a wall. With the balls modified so they are lighter, slower and lower bouncing (red and orange balls), hitting against a wall is easier, safer and allows a child to take a full swing at the ball and still have time to recover and prepare for the next shot.

Almost any wall will work. To make things more challenging and realistic, make a net line 3 feet from the ground so your child learns to hit above the net. A second line can be drawn on the ground a certain distance from the wall so that your child will have to hit with some degree of power to make the ball rebound off the wall and back to the line.

Kids can play a variety of games either with a partner or individually. For example, try for the longest forehand rally or alternating between forehands and backhands. Try moving closer to the wall and hit volleys before the ball bounces. Count how many shots hit in a row that go over the net line without moving inside the line on the ground.



You will be pleasantly surprised by how your child will learn to love tennis and at the skills your kids will develop through spontaneous play. In fact, developing skills through repetition and spontaneous play is the one of the best ways to get lots of hitting, movement and activity.

## **Kids have fun when they actually play...allow a child plenty of opportunities to play with and against a large number of players.**

### **Supervised Play**

Parents can also encourage their kids to participate in supervised play. Supervised play can be offered anywhere in which courts are made available for kids to use under the direction of an adult. The role of the adult is to serve as the “gatekeeper” and provide a safe area in which everyone has an opportunity to play. Similar to an “open gym” for basketball or an “open pool” for swimming, these opportunities are ideal for schools, youth centers and neighborhoods where kids can meet up and enjoy the camaraderie of playing with one another.



### **Structured Play**

As your child develops an interest in tennis, finding an organized program is a great way to improve her skills and provide further development through lessons, clinics and additional play opportunities. Look for a program that uses the QuickStart Tennis play format in its instruction. Check to see if the program is using courts and equipment that is scaled down to the size and ability of the child. Ask if the instructors have received special training in working with young children. Finally, make sure the program includes more than just lessons. Kids have fun when they actually play, so the program should have competitive opportunities that are non-elimination and allow a child plenty of opportunities to play with and against a large number of players.

### **Team Play**

Many children will enjoy the camaraderie of a team atmosphere. USTA Jr. Team Tennis provides kids the opportunity to learn and compete on a team and be with their friends. Matches and practices are team-based and are fun because kids have the support of teammates and coaches.

Parents can play a valuable role and be involved at many levels. Like other sports, parents can carpool to get kids to practices and matches, provide drinks and refreshments, serve as scorekeepers during matches, take kids to professional, college or even high school matches, and organize an end-of-the-season pizza party. These are great ways to spend time with your children while also providing them with valuable experiences and lifelong memories.



Some parents might want to coach or assist on-court. The USTA provides workshops—both Recreational Coaches Workshops and workshops designed specifically for teaching the QuickStart Tennis play format—designed for new coaches to will teach and coach teams of young players. For more information, go to [USTA.com](http://USTA.com) and click on the “Coaches/Organizers” tab at the top of the page.



## Chapter 6: Getting Your Child Started

Parents can be great at introducing their children to the sport of tennis. You may not think of yourself as a coach, but there are several activities you can do with your child to get them started. The goal is to eventually get children to rally with you in the driveway, just like kicking a soccer ball or playing catch with the football, Frisbee or baseball in the backyard, or shooting a basketball in the driveway.

Some of these activities can be done with children ages 3-5 to give them a foundation for the moving, balancing, throwing, catching and tracking involved in playing tennis. All of these activities can be done at home with simple equipment.

You must be aware that, at ages 3-5, your child will have a very limited attention span. They may enjoy the activity for only a few minutes before moving on to something different. This is very common and acceptable, and these activities can be repeated often and in short duration.

Children will have different levels of success so make sure to be positive, patient and encouraging, and to reward their efforts. Your most important job is to make the game fun for both you and your child. They will model your behavior so smile, have fun, be encouraging and positive in tone and body language.

### Activities for children 3-5 years old

#### Koosh ball pass

Stand with your child holding your racquets, and with one Koosh ball or beanbag. Try passing the Koosh ball back and forth from one racquet to the other. After several successful trials, move back so you have to make a gentle toss to get the Koosh ball from one racquet to the other. Add a challenge by tossing the Koosh ball low, high and even adding a creative catch, such as standing on one leg, between the legs, just above the ground, on one knee, etc. Let your child be creative with her catch.

#### Bungee Jump

Have your child balance a ball on the strings of his racquet. While he is walking around, have him stop, drop the ball off the racquet, let it bounce and catch the ball back on the racquet. Kids may have to use their hands to trap the ball on the strings, but with practice they can just use the racquet face.

#### Roll Ball Tennis

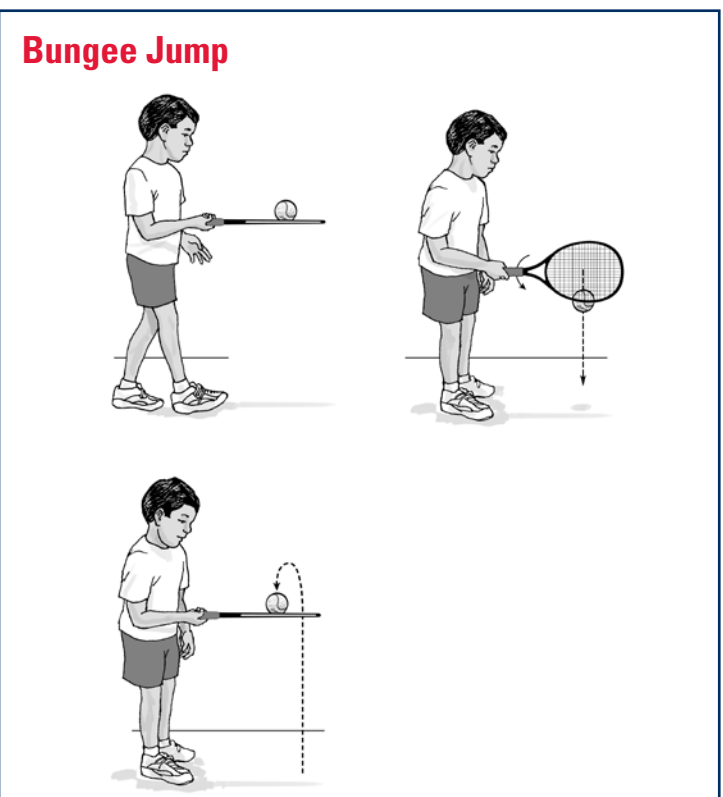
Standing about 5 feet apart, roll the ball back and forth with your child. Each player will roll the ball with her racquet and stop it before rolling the ball back. See how many rolls and stops you can get in a row. As a variation, use your foot to stop the ball before rolling it back, or change the size of the ball. A larger ball, like a playground or soccer ball, is easier to track and stop.

#### One bounce – Two Bounce

Using a playground ball, toss the ball up in the air so your child can catch it after the bounce. To develop tracking skills, call out one, two or three and have your child catch the ball after the announced number of bounces. Make sure you toss it high enough to give your child time to move and catch, especially when using multiple bounces.

#### Throw Ball

Using a playground ball and a rope or string as a net, throw the ball back and forth with your child using two hands and a release from the side. The rotation will be similar as when hitting a forehand and backhand. You can allow multiple bounces if necessary. As your child improves at this activity, throw the ball on either side to create movement before catching the ball.







## Racquet Quickness

Stand facing your child with each of you balancing a racquet with the head of the frame on the ground and the handle pointing up. At the count of three, switch places and so you catch your child's racquet and they catch yours without letting the racquet fall on the ground. After several successful trials, move back a half step at a time and see how far you can go without letting the racquets drop.

## Ball Drop

The parent will face his child and has a ball in both hands and arms extended at shoulder height. The parent drops one ball and the child runs and catches the ball after one bounce. Move slightly back after each successful drop, bounce and catch. (Two children can also play this drill together.)

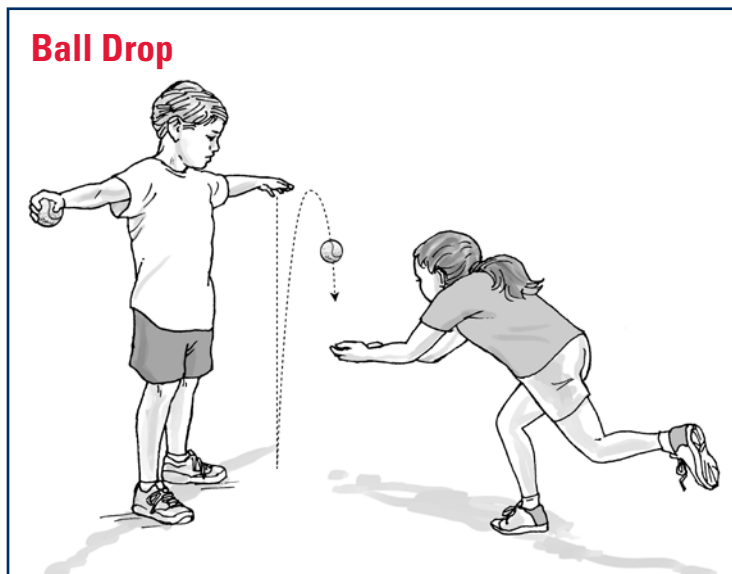
## Call My Name

This time the parent has one ball and the child is standing 6 feet in front of the parent and facing the same direction. (The child's back is to the parent.) The parent tosses the ball up and calls out the name of the child. The child has to turn around and catch the ball after one bounce.

## Activities for children 6 and up

### Rally with one or two bounces

The child will mini-rally with the parent over a line or low obstacle. This could be a string or rope tied between two chairs, a ladder or a portable net. Foam balls are best because they move slowly through the air and travel a limited distance. You can rally using one or two bounces.



## Juggle Rally

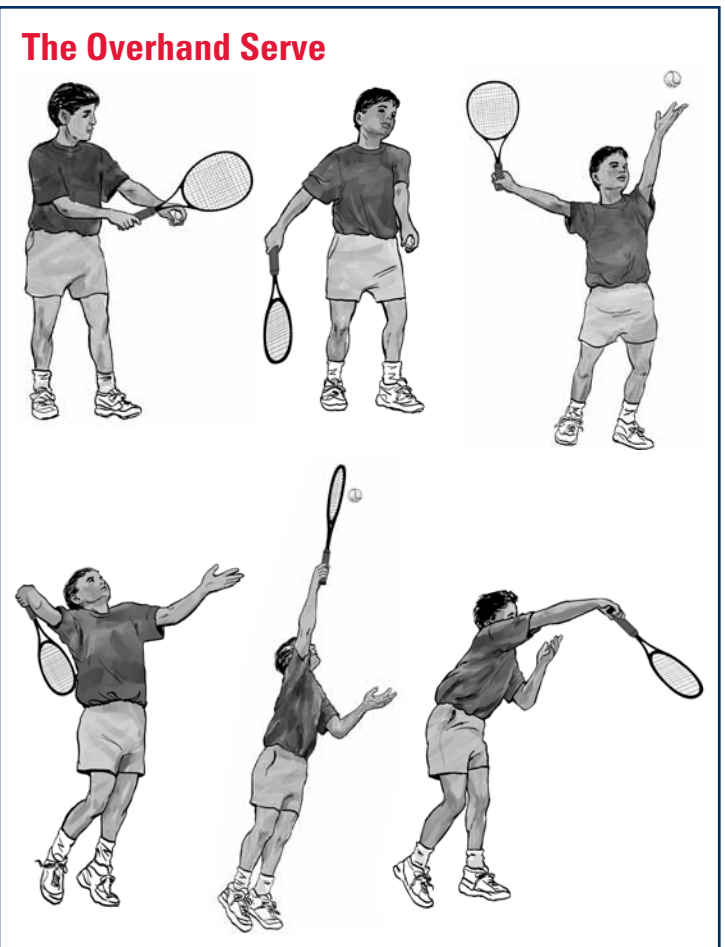
Pair up with your child on either side of the net. The parent self rallies (tap up and bounce) the ball once and hits it over the net. The child does the same self rally (tap up and bounce) before hitting it over the net. This could be done with one, two or three self rallies, and can be done on both the forehand and backhand sides.

## Creative Rallies

Be creative with your rallies with your child—both hit ball high in the air, low and just over the net, standing on one foot, hitting all balls with two hands on the racquet, hitting with only one hand on the racquet or skipping to get into position for the hit. Keep the ball in play as long as possible.

## Nerf football throw

Nerf footballs are softer, smaller and lighter and are excellent for developing the proper overhand serving motion. Throw the Nerf football back and forth with your child using the overhand throwing motion and try for a tight spiral after the release.





## Chapter 7: Ideal Programs for Your Child

There are introductory tennis programs in many communities throughout the country. Most take the form of beginning tennis lessons. While these are generally a good and affordable place to start, the ideal program will offer your child a place to progress and participate by offering opportunities to play. USTA Jr. Team Tennis is gaining in popularity because kids can learn in team practices and compete in team matches. Listed below are some characteristics of an outstanding tennis program.

- Younger children (ages 10 and under) participate on scaled-down courts (either 36' or 60' courts) use smaller racquets along with lighter and slower balls. Scaling the game to the size of the child makes it easier to learn and play. After the basics are learned, your child will develop the skills necessary for hitting with direction, height, depth, spin and power. In playing sessions, children can begin to understand and practice simple tactics.
- Team play is fun for kids. They like the camaraderie of playing with friends and teammates and the support and encouragement of a good coach. It is fun to be with friends and to wear a team uniform. Team matches are also an excellent way to introduce your child to competition.
- Competition (see Chapter 3 for more) is important because, when used appropriately, it will motivate your child to develop and also accelerate that development. As mentioned previously, team

matches are an excellent way for kids to compete. Find programs that offer different levels of competition based on the ability and experience of the child. The first stages should be festival like with plenty of activities and modified match situations. These matches should be short in duration (half-day events would be the maximum) with no documented results. Being at or near the bottom of the list is very discouraging, and kids in that situation will lack confidence and will probably look for another sport or activity.

- Individual competition should be conducted using round robin or compass draw formats. These formats allow kids to play many matches against a variety of players without being eliminated. Matches should use shortened scoring methods or even times matches.
- Qualified coaches and pros are critical to the success of any program. Check to see if the coaches in your area have received any special training on how to work with children. Observe lessons, clinics and team practices to see if the kids are active, having fun, learning new skills and making new friends. Are the coaches encouraging and motivating? Are they engaged in the lesson or practice and do they look like they are having fun on the court? Inquire if coaches have received any specialized training for teaching children 10 and under and if they use the QuickStart Tennis play format. Finally, ask if the coaches follow a written plan that progresses kids through the skills and tactics necessary to become an accomplished player.





## Chapter 8: Characteristics of Children (and reasons QuickStart Tennis works for young children)

Children ages 10 and under are not miniature adults, which is why the QuickStart Tennis play format uses specifications designed to be age-, size-, skill- and attention span-appropriate for children. The goal of 10 and Under Tennis is to establish court and equipment specifications that ensure maximum activity based on the ability to serve, rally and score. The court size and net height are smaller and to scale for the child, much like soccer, basketball and football, among others.


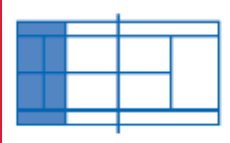

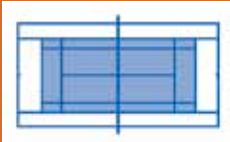

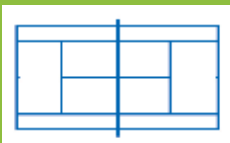

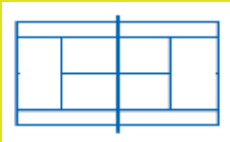
It is difficult to imagine how young soccer players would perform on a full-sized field and goals. How much activity would there be

if children played baseball on a major league field and how much fun basketball would be if young kids used baskets at the same height the pros use?

Children are certainly not as strong, so using racquets that are shorter and lighter enables them to swing and maneuver the racquets and have the ability to change direction, depth, speed and spin of the ball.

Balls are lighter, softer and move slower through the air. Young children have three to four times the reaction speed of an adult so they will get to and return more balls because the ball is moving slower and the court is smaller.

Even the scoring format is modified so kids are playing matches that are shorter to avoid injuries and are much more appropriate to the attention span of the child rather than playing matches the same length as the pros.

| STAGE  | AGE               | BALL  | COURT   | NET HEIGHT                   | RACQUET<br><small>(Depending on the size of the player)</small> | SCORING  | DESCRIPTION  |
|--------|-------------------|---|---|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| RED    | 5 - 8 years       | <br>Red felt or foam<br>Reduced bounce for ages 5 - 8          | <br>36' x 18'                            | 2'9"                         | Up to 23"   | 2 out of 3, 7-point tiebreaks (official USTA rule for 8 and Under competition) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slower play on smaller court</li> <li>Shorter racquets enable earlier rally/play</li> <li>Individual/team games and activities are played</li> <li>Development of technique and simple tactics</li> <li>Required specifications for all USTA-sanctioned 8 and Under tournament play*</li> </ul> |
| ORANGE | 9 - 10 years      | <br>Orange<br>Reduced bounce for ages 9 - 10                   | <br>60' x 21' singles, 60' x 27' doubles | 3' center, 3'6" at net posts | 23" - 25"   | 2 out of 3, 4-game sets using no-ad scoring; 3rd set is a 7-point tiebreak     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Play is faster vs. Red stage</li> <li>Lower bounce appropriate for child's size</li> <li>Implementation of advanced techniques and tactics</li> <li>Longer matches for individual/team events</li> <li>Approved for USTA-sanctioned 10 and Under tournament play**</li> </ul>                   |
| GREEN  | 9 - 12 years      | <br>Green<br>Slightly reduced bounce from standard tennis ball | <br>78' x 27' singles, 78' x 36' doubles | 3' center, 3'6" at net posts | 25" - 27"   | Modified scoring formats for shorter matches are recommended                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Play is faster vs. Orange stage</li> <li>Continued development of technique, movement and advanced tactics</li> <li>Individual/team events are played</li> <li>Approved for USTA-sanctioned 10 and Under tournament play**</li> </ul>   |
| YELLOW | 11 years and over | <br>Yellow<br>Standard tennis ball                             | <br>78' x 27' singles, 78' x 36' doubles | 3' center, 3'6" at net posts | 25" - 29"   | Any scoring system within the Rules of Tennis                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After progression of Red, Orange and Green stages</li> </ul>  |

\* Red - Official rule in 2011 \*\* Orange and Green - Official rule effective 2012





## Chapter 9: Role of the Parent

Much has been said about the importance of the first experience, of getting kids started with simple activities at home, using the right equipment, finding the best program and the value of a good coach. The parent has a support role in all of these endeavors, but that doesn't necessarily mean you have to assume responsibility of making your child a tennis player.

Learning to play and enjoy the sport of tennis is one of the greatest gifts you can give your child. As children go through the process of becoming a player, they will have numerous experiences that will serve as life lessons and create teachable moments. There will be times when winning and losing are an issue, and parents need to understand the ups and downs of winning and losing so they can keep the long-term development of their child in focus.

It has been said that sport does not build character, but it does reveal it. Tennis provides many opportunities for kids to learn and develop character by playing by the rules, making their own line calls, respecting officials and opponents, learning to win humbly and lose graciously. These are all teachable moments, and parents should take these opportunities to teach character at the highest standard.

Learning to play tennis and playing the game well will take a long-term commitment of practice, play and competition. The discipline of practice, training and conditioning is a great quality to develop.



Tennis is an easy game to learn but it will take time, effort and dedication to meet the challenge of improving skills to achieve the goal of playing it well.

What better way to be active, which is a huge concern for many parents, than for your child to fall in love with tennis and enjoy playing this great sport for a lifetime. Tennis is almost unmatched in the physical activity it provides kids and players of all ages.

Parents can play a very important role in selecting a program and a coach. Once those decisions have been made, the parent should concentrate on being a supportive and encouraging role model and leave the teaching to the coaches. Let them be responsible for teaching the physical and mental skills necessary for winning. Parents should concentrate on developing those life skills that develop character such as respect, effort, self-control, dedication, overcoming mistakes and adapting to the conditions, that will carry over into what your child becomes as an adult.

### ...parents need to understand the ups and downs of winning and losing...

Tennis provides opportunities that are unique. Tennis is a great individual sport to learn. Children of all sizes and shapes can learn to play the game successfully and develop at their own pace. Much depends on the commitment to practice and play, but that can be determined with the help and guidance of the parent. There are individual-competition opportunities across the country starting with novice-level events that your child can enjoy. Starting as a child is a lifelong journey. Tennis can be played at any age in almost every country in the world.

Tennis is also a great team sport. Each year more and more kids are learning and competing as part of a team. They enjoy the social aspects of a team environment, the camaraderie of teammates and the support and encouragement of a coach. Many middle schools and most high schools offer tennis teams that allow kids to be with their friends, represent their school and compete as a team. The USTA offers Jr. Team Tennis programs that are spreading rapidly throughout the country. Team play continues as your child goes on to college with opportunities both at the varsity and club levels.

Finally, a positive experience of learning, playing and competing, and the enjoyment your child will have on the tennis court, driveway or hitting wall will be one of the great memories your child will take into adulthood. Tennis is a great gift—and one that every parent can provide to his or her child.

