

Special Olympics Tennis Quick Start Guide

On-Court Training Activities



Alternating Ground strokes

Athletes alternate between forehand and backhand ground strokes while adding movement to the ball. The key is for athlete to begin in ready position, early racquet preparation (racquet back with shoulder turn), take a few steps to the ball, stop, step in to contact ball, then recover by shuffling back to center mark and ready position and then repeat pattern on opposite side. Athletes change grips while in ready position.

Hitting with Movement

For many Special Olympics tennis players, moving to the ball and then executing a stroke can be very difficult. It is important for coaches to instruct athletes that in a match the ball is not going to come to them; they must move to the ball. Hitting with movement drills should be introduced in the early stages of skill development and should lead to practices that prepare athletes for match play.

- ◆ There are five steps to developing efficient movement around the court.
 1. The athlete needs to determine the direction of the approaching ball. To practice, toss balls to the athlete positioned on the other side of the court. The athlete points in the direction of the approaching ball with the non-racquet hand before the ball reaches the net.
 2. Make contact with the ball. The athlete runs toward the tossed ball and catches it after only one bounce. This can be progressed into a drill where the athlete next catches the ball on the strings.
 3. Turn the shoulders and take the racquet back into the hitting position while running toward the ball.
 4. Step forward with the front foot as contact is made with the ball. Asking the athlete to freeze at that point allows the coach to get a good view of the athlete's footwork.
 5. After following-through, the athlete turns and takes a few running steps back to the center of the court.

Throughout the sequence, practice the split step to maintain balance. To execute the split step, as the opponent starts his/her swing, the athlete jumps on both feet. Use the key words "split step" or "take little steps." Be sure the athlete understands that the split step occurs all over the court and in between each contact or swing of the racquet

Assessing Player Readiness

- ◆ Beginners typically do not like to run to the ball. They would rather reach from the waist, extend their arms and then flick their wrist at the ball rather than move their feet.
- ◆ Intermediate players will move more readily to the ball but will often get "jammed" with a ball that is too close or they will reach for a ball that is too far away.
- ◆ The best tennis players move to the ball quickly and get in position to execute their stroke effectively. They are rarely out of position and are balanced at the end of each stroke. They always seem to be in the right place.

Coaching Tips

- Practice movement without equipment.
- Incorporate movement into warm-ups.
- Athletes shadow coaches movements.
- After practicing movement, add ball.
 - Athlete starts at T on service line.
 - Athlete runs to tossed ball.
 - Athlete stops and catches ball then throws balls over net.
 - Athlete shuffles back to center.
- Next add racquet