

Special Olympics Tennis Quick Start Guide

On-Court Training Activities



Return of Serve

After the serve, the return of serve is the most important shot in tennis. Successful tennis players have consistent returns.

Assessing Player Readiness

Special Olympics athletes must constantly be reminded to be ready and pay attention to the server. Teach players to watch the ball during the toss. This allows for immediate tracking skills to take place. It is often necessary for the athlete to move toward the ball for the return. These can be very difficult concepts to master, but are necessary for the athlete to progress.

Teaching the Skill

- ♦ The basic ready position (using a forehand grip), presented in the groundstroke lesson, is used in the return of serve. Use the key words “relax,” “look for the ball” and “be ready.”
- ♦ Athletes should begin near the baseline, close enough to touch the singles sideline. The position is the same for both singles and doubles play.

Return of Serve Stroke

- ♦ The return of serve is similar to the forehand and backhand, with a shorter backswing due to decreased time to react to the ball. Use the key words “turn,” “shorten your backswing” and “move to the ball.”
- ♦ The student turns as if preparing for a volley and takes the racquet back as the body is turning. This helps teach a shorter backswing.
- ♦ Footwork is similar to groundstroke preparation. With limited reaction time, the athlete may take just one step toward the ball before contact. Be sure that the initial step or steps will achieve a suitable position. A step in the wrong direction will tell the coach that more time is needed working on tracking skills.
- ♦ To practice return of serve, have the athlete track the oncoming serve and catch the ball in a short court format. Increase distance as skill progresses.

Key Words

- ♦ “Relax”
- ♦ “Look for the ball”
- ♦ “Be ready”
- ♦ “Turn”
- ♦ “Shorten your backswing”
- ♦ “Move to the ball”