

# STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT IN TENNIS



REGISTRO PROFESIONAL  
DE TENIS

# GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

One of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of coaching is being able to work with players during their transition from childhood through adolescence and into young adulthood. This is the time of greatest change and growth in their lives.

Coaches who have worked with players in this stage know that their players' bodies, emotions, and thought processes can transform rapidly, sometimes changing several times in a single day! The coach who has an understanding of the changes associated with physical, emotional and mental growth will be better equipped to communicate with the players and help them deal with any challenges that may arise along the way.

# EARLY ADOLESCENCE – AGES 8-15

This is a great time to be a coach. Most players look up to you as a coach and want to listen and learn. In fact, you are a role model in all that you say and do. This is the time to build the basics: sound technical skills, love of the sport, and good practice and competition habits.

It is in this phase that you have the ability to help players establish the routines and attitudes they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. If players do not learn the basics now, they are unlikely to learn them later in adolescence. Some general guidelines for coaches to follow are presented below.

# COACHING GUIDELINES FOR EARLY ADOLESCENCE

- ⦿ **This is a “romance phase”** - Build in fun, balanced with concentration and intensity.
- ⦿ **Emphasise fundamentals and technique** - Accentuate gaining skills and doing one’s best, rather than focusing on the ultimate outcome of the match. Teach a ritual or routine to use between points to aid in concentration and relaxation.
- ⦿ **Begin limited strength training** – Focus on developing core stability and endurance and providing basic athletic skills like agility, balance, and coordination. Teach dynamic warm-up and its importance before practice. A firm foundation in the core muscles (trunk, hips, abdomen and lower back) is the basis for all future strength and power development. Always insist on proper technique.
- ⦿ **Realise you are a role model** - As a role model; give positive messages about healthy body image, good eating habits and the value of rest and recovery. As a coach, teach players and parents how to plan meals, develop hydration strategies, and plan for rest.

- ◉ **Promote teamwork and set standards** - Teach working with others in practice and coping with winning and losing.
- ◉ **Establish periods of rest and recovery** - Most children should have at least two days off a week to help the body keep growing. Avoid over-training and consolidate the gains made during training. Plan times away from tennis to coincide with high demand times at school. Also, teach about proper nutritional recovery following competition or practice.
- ◉ **Establish ground rules, communication patterns and goals with parents.** Learn about the positives of parental push versus the negatives of parental shoving.
- ◉ **Take time now to form a sports medicine team** - Connect players with sports medicine professionals as part of their support team: physician, nutritionist, conditioning specialist and psychologist Discuss and model good eating habits – or have a nutritionist come in to give a workshop.

# MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE: AGES 12-18 YEARS

The transition phase of middle adolescence typically has the most changes and turbulence. The hormones are raging during middle adolescence so expect to see mood swings. Rapid changes in body size can affect centre of gravity and motor performance, and players may seem to be gangly and uncoordinated for a few years as they adapt to their new bodies.

Social/emotional development is characterised by connecting to a peer group and challenging authority, yet a tennis player traveling alone or with adults to tournaments may feel left out of the normal fun things other adolescents are doing. Girls, in particular, may find that their participation in sport is devalued. The bottom line is tennis may no longer be seen as cool or fun, and may be abandoned for more socially acceptable activities.

# COACHING GUIDELINES FOR MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE

- ◉ **Focus on refinement and precision of tennis skills** - This includes tactical understanding, technical mastery and weapon development.
- ◉ **Recognise growth spurt, hormonal changes** - Girls start their growth spurt around age 12, finishes by 13-15, while growth starts in boys around age 14, and may not end until age 18-22.
- ◉ **Understand peer group influences** - The approval of friends and peer group becomes all important.
- ◉ **Increase intensity and develop mental aspects of tennis** - Expect players to learn from and accept their mistakes and distractions, and keep control on or off court.
- ◉ **Allow players to provide more input into training** - Actively solicit selected input from players into planning training, tactics, competition and rest and recovery times. Help them to analyse court situations, think for him or her, and solve problems.
- ◉ **Expect questioning, challenges from players** - Players are likely to challenge and question your authority, information, and rules.
- ◉ **Communicate with parents regularly** – Clearly explain training goals and objectives. Work with parents together on setting consistent standards.

- ◉ **Add strength, nutrition, stretching** - Proper training during this growth stage includes stretching and core strengthening. Use more movement and balance drills to offset the changes in weight and the body's centre of gravity. To best determine the right off court training, begin to individualise for each player and stage of growth. Conduct basic fitness and physical tests for weakness and inflexibility. Continue to emphasise aerobic fitness, with running or other sports.
- ◉ **Refer to your team of sports medicine experts** - seek their assistance with yearly physical exams/nutrition advice and advice on body image.
- ◉ **Monitor for over-training** - Because this is a rapid growth phase, rest and recovery are essential. Incorporate at least one day off a week and schedule time off to coincide with times of high demand in their life such as school.
- ◉ **Be conscience of preventing burnout/boredom** - The biggest risks of burnout in this age group are from boredom and over-training, so prevent these problems by periodising training an incorporating fun. It is important to include activities that are more social and team events to help reduce dropout from tennis at this stage.

Body composition also changes considerably during this time. Girls gain body fat and develop a body ready for reproduction. Boys gain muscle and a larger heart and lungs. The weight gain in girls occurs about 6-9 months after their growth spurt, while boys gain weight at the same time as their height increase. The weight gain is natural and is due to hormone action.

However, in today's weight and image-obsessed culture, the body changes can be very distressing. Both boys and girls are at risk for body image distortions. What are most men told to do to improve their performance? "Bulk up" or "gain weight." The idealised male body is muscular with a well-defined "six-pack" abdomen. But this is an impossible goal for most young adolescent males, thus some turn to ineffective protein supplements, hours in the gym and abuse anabolic steroids or growth hormone in the effort to build more muscle. This preoccupation with appearance and a muscular body image taken to an extreme is known in men as the "Adonis Complex".

In contrast, girls are told to lose weight to be better at sport. They are fighting a battle of evolutionary proportions. Hormones cause body changes, not overeating nor a lack of “will power”.

Pressured to be unrealistically thin, some women develop disordered eating--anorexia, bulimia, or the Female Athlete Triad.

Adolescents are already overly sensitive about their bodies, so avoid making comments about any player’s weight and appearance. Refer these issues to one of the professionals on your team.

If you pick up clues about harmful eating practices and poor body and self-image, discuss your observations with their parents.

Work together to get the player the help they need early and refer to a nutritionist, primary care physician or psychologist.

# LATE ADOLESCENCE: AGES 15-25

Physical training on and off the court can peak as the player stops growing and starts “filling in.” Increases in testosterone in males make it possible for players to fully develop their muscles, and get more power.

Emphasise developing players’ strength and balance along with power. Some adolescents are “late bloomers,” and may not have the body capable of an adult tennis game until very late adolescence.

In particular, boys who were not great tennis players early during puberty may find they catch up and exceed their age groups peers at this stage.

# COACHING GUIDELINES FOR LATE ADOLESCENCE

- ◉ **Focus on achieving potential/integrating/performing** - This is the time when critical decisions are made about school, sport and work. Coaches can help the athlete focus on specific realistic goals in tennis.
- ◉ **Develop strength, control and power from firm foundation.** Now is the time to engage in a full-fledged strength and conditioning program that emphasises performance enhancement and injury prevention. Seek out a certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist.
- ◉ **Encourage player to develop an individual style** - While peer group approval is still important, now the player is trying out being individual and different.
- ◉ **Players are self-determined/independent** - They should have developed a good sense of who they are and what type of player they are with confidence in a weapon and when to use it.
- ◉ **Have players set own goals with parents/coaches** - Players can analyse more complex on-court situations and react to them. They can set their own short and long-term goals and design much of their training and competition plan with the assistance of a coach.
- ◉ **Sports medicine:** performance exam, nutrition plan, strength training

# SUMMARY

There are a number of changes that players go through as they grow and develop.

We need to understand where our players are and when to take advantage of windows of opportunity.

By recognising how players are impacted by growth, you will be better equipped to optimise their long-term development and enhance their potential.



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