

Programming and Scheduling

Correct planning and scheduling of a player's programme is the key to ensuring that progress and development is made in both the short and long term.

Correct planning involves considering the key performance factors, along with a player's and family's lifestyle and commitments, and the fact that through this phase of the programme players are very young and are learning to love playing and competing.

The key areas to be considered are the following:

Tennis coaching and practice
Strength and conditioning (physical development)
Competition
Playing other sports
Building adequate rest into the programme

As tennis is an individual sport many differing factors influence how much tennis a youngster should play on a regular basis. These factors include tennis ability and experience, physical maturity, current mental capacities (including concentration and application), overall lifestyle, playing other sports, and commitments to academic programmes.

As a rule of thumb, a player's programme should, on average, be the equivalent to their actual age (e.g. 8 year olds to play 8 hours per week, 9 year olds to play 9 hours per week, etc.). From 11 years of age a player's programme can move to around 15 hours per week - though this does depend on maturity levels.

NB: No. of hours indicates a total activity programme (tennis, competition and S&C).

Further planning considerations:

Tennis Coaching and Practice:

- Ensure the player has a good balance within the programme between individual lessons, squad coaching and self-organised play. The actual ratios will vary depending upon:

Technical needs of the player (more individual lessons during a skill learning block).

An increase in squad sessions when consolidating learned skills.

More practice and game-based situations nearer to competition phase (self-regulated).

Strength and Conditioning:

- Ideally a programme needs to be put into place by someone who has a qualification in this area or a highly skilled coach of young children. (Further advice on S&C planning can be obtained from the LTA Strength and Conditioning Fundamentals CD ROM for 10&under players)
- S&C can be combined with tennis sessions or carried out separately. When planning sessions, speed, agility and coordination sessions are best carried out when the player is fresh (before tennis), whilst strength and endurance based activities can be run after tennis.
- Ensure variety is introduced into S&C programmes and adequate rest is built in between exercises. Warming up and cooling down times and activities need to be considered importantly.

Competition:

- Competition is a key component in overall player development, with a very strong emphasis being placed on gaining experience and becoming competitive rather than on winning and losing.
- Both over-competing and under-competing can have a negative impact on progress with the following consequence:

Over competing:

- Players do not have a chance to develop correct technical skills due to the pressure of competition.
- Players lose their appetite for the game.
- More potential for overuse injury.

Under Competing:

- Players do not develop confidence and get dejected through losing too many matches.
 - Competitive experience including problem solving and decision making is under-developed.
 - Competitive players lose their appetite for the game if they are naturally competitive.
- When scheduling a competition period, ideally a player should not play more than three tournaments in a row without having the opportunity for re-grouping, rest, and further game development.
 - When sourcing competition there should be a balance between three levels of matches:

Those where the player can win relatively easily thereby giving them the opportunity of playing without too much pressure, experimenting with new or learned techniques and being creative.

Those where the level of opponent is roughly equal and the players need to apply themselves fully, and compete and experience a wider range of situations.

A few competitions above their normal level (playing up), where the player experiences stronger opposition to see where their next steps of development lie.

Playing Other Sports

- Playing other sports is an invaluable way of complementing tennis development, particularly up to 12 years of age, improving areas of agility, balance and coordination, and combating the one-sided nature of our sport.
- Team sports can be particularly beneficial to young players due to tennis being a very individual activity.
- Whilst many sports can provide both a positive and enjoyable effect, the commonly played sports by current top professional players include:

- Football (both boys and girls)
 - Hockey
 - Basketball/netball
 - Gymnastics
 - Swimming
- Many sports are now catered for with mini versions, so a high level of skill and competence can be obtained quickly.
- Contact sports should be avoided.

Building in Adequate Rest:

- In many sports adequate rest and recovery stimulates the improvement of skill learning and physical conditioning.
- Young players should have at least one day away from tennis per week and, additionally, one day off during the weekend when not competing. It may also be a good chance to do some unstructured tennis play with friends.
- There should be two periods in the year when a player is able to have a block of around two weeks where there is no organised tennis training, practice or competition. These blocks should be positioned around:
 - End of summer competition schedule (before children go back to school)
 - End of winter competition period
- Family holidays are to be encouraged, though good planning is essential not to miss key competitions.
- Rest should be considered "active"; i.e. children follow healthy lifestyle activities including bike riding, playing with friends, swimming, etc. These are fun activities as opposed to just watching television or playing computer games.

Recommended training hours per week

Overall training hours per week

Age		Tennis Training		Physical training programme			Other sports		Total hours per week	
Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Training age	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl
7	7	3 - 5	3 - 5	1 - 2 years	2 x 30 mins	2 x 30 mins	1.5	1.5	5.5 - 7.5	5.5 - 7.5
8	8	4 - 6.5	4 - 6.5	2 - 3 years	3 x 30 mins	3 x 30 mins	2	2	7.5 - 10	7.5 - 10
9	9	5 - 8	6 - 9	3 - 4 years	3 x 45 mins	3 x 45 mins	2	2	9 - 12	10 - 13
10	10	5 - 8	6 - 9	4 - 5 years	3 hrs	4 - 5 hrs	2	2	10 - 13	12.5 - 15.5
11	11	6 - 10	7 - 11	5 - 6 years	5 hrs	5 - 6 hrs	2	2	13 - 17	15 - 18.5
12	12	6 - 10	7 - 12	6 - 7 years	7 hrs	7 - 8 hrs	2	2	15 - 19	16 - 21

*Training age is as important when prescribing training load as chronological age as it is a clearer indicator of readiness to handle training volume. For example, a 9 year old who has never trained before should probably be on the same volume as a 7 year old.

**S&C hours increases in the same way as "Training hours" for girls, but more importantly the type of training for girls from 11+ is quite different to boys.

Number of matches (outside of internal competition during training)

	7	8	9	10	11	12
Male	60-150	60-100	80-120	50-80	50-80	50-80
Female	60-150	60-100	80-120	50-80	50-80	50-80

RED = Tie break to 10 is one match

ORANGE = Best of three tie breaks to 7 is one match

GREEN = Best of three short sets (up to 4 games) with third set a match tie break

YELLOW = Best of three sets with third set a match tie break