

# **ITF Coaches Education Programme**

## **Coaching High Performance Players Course**



# **TACTICS IN THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE GAME**

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# By the end of this session you should be able to:

- Explain the evolution of tactics in the different stages of the game (from beginner to advanced):
  - 12 and Under
  - 14 and Under
  - 18 and Under
- Introduce other tactical developmental issues
- Adequately adapt these concepts to your daily work with high performance players

# Tactics in the different stages of the game (12, 14, 18 & Under)

- Players learn by playing and training
- Coaches should help them in this process
- Tactical skills should be learned at the same time as the rest of skills (technical, physical, mental)
- Tactical training should be introduced from the beginning



# Tactical Development 12 & Under

# 12 & Under Tactics

SKILLS STROKES	FREQUENT SITUATIONS TO HANDLE	FREQUENT TACTICS / PATTERNS TO IMPLEMENT	HOW TO DO IT
<b>SERVING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children usually do not aim to hit aces or winners.</li> <li>- No serve and volley.</li> <li>- 11/12 year old's are frightened of double faults → they serve very weak 2<sup>e</sup> serves.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Children find efficiency in consistency, depth and not to be under attack.</li> <li>- Boys, when they are tall enough, should begin to serve winners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- At 11/12, they should start to put some spin to get protection, be consistent and aggressive at the same time.</li> <li>- Always make the children serve and return at the beginning of practice, just after the warm-up.</li> </ul>
<b>RECEIVING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not really offensive, though serves are pretty weak; they mostly aim for consistent and deep returns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- At 11/12, they should learn to be aggressive and open the court by playing to crosscourt zones.</li> <li>- On 2<sup>e</sup> serve, they should try to hit more winners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Play doubles to emphasize return of serve.</li> <li>- Always go forward, hit the ball before top of bounce.</li> <li>- Use open stance.</li> <li>- Always make the children serve and return at the beginning of practice, just after the warm-up.</li> </ul>



# 12 & Under Tactics

SKILLS STROKES	FREQUENT SITUATIONS TO HANDLE	FREQUENT TACTICS / PATTERNS TO IMPLEMENT	HOW TO DO IT
<b>BOTH AT THE BASELINE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- At 11/12, they should play a lot of rallies where high and deep balls are efficient.</li><li>- Girls play too much in the centre of the court, with no opening of the sides.</li><li>- 11/12 year old's should start using their weapons: strong forehands.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- At 11/12, they should learn to play crosscourt to open the court, and accelerate down the line.</li><li>- They also should understand the benefit of playing early after the bounce rather than just trying to hit too strong.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Boys and girls must learn to use their best shots.</li><li>- → play games with bonus points for winners or volleys.</li></ul>

# 12 & Under Tactics

SKILLS STROKES	FREQUENT SITUATIONS TO HANDLE	FREQUENT TACTICS / PATTERNS TO IMPLEMENT	HOW TO DO IT
<b>APPROACHING OR AT THE NET</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Boys can be efficient at the volley, especially on hard courts.</li> <li>-At 11/12 they are very vulnerable to lobs → they often recover far from the net.</li> <li>- They often prefer to let the ball bounce and hit a forehand than a smash.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Children mostly come to the net when the opponent does not expect it rather than by a classical approach.</li> <li>-They only go to the net by way of « classical » approach on very short balls.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Play a lot of doubles.</li> <li>-Develop topspin volley through drills and game situations.</li> <li>-Start training sessions at the net.</li> <li>-Practice smash against the wall.</li> </ul>
<b>PLAYING AGAINST THE NET PLAYER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not a lot to say, 11/12 year olds are usually pretty efficient in the defensive patterns because the net players are not yet physically strong. Lobs win a lot of points.</li> </ul>		



# Tactical Development 14 & Under



# 14 & Under Tactical Development Introduction

- Development of an all court game
- Aggressive decision making
- In accordance with the physical strength capacities of the player.
- Learn how to play as aggressively as possible within his physical strength capacities.
- A defensive game at this age:
  - Create significant problems
  - Will likely hinder the player's development in the 18/U category.

# 14 & Under Tactical Development

## When to start?

- At the beginning of the growth spurt
- When we have the most information about:
  - Physical
  - Mental
  - Technical characteristics
- Required to guide the player toward an individual game style

# 14 & Under Tactical Development Goals

- **Knowing all tactical situations:**
  - Using the court
  - Understanding the different options in all tactical situations
- **Experimenting with different game styles:**
  - Both as a player as well as an opponent.
  - If this is not achieved appropriately, the player will not be able to develop tactically at the 18/U level.

# 14 & Under Tactical Development

## How to do it?



### Closed - half open - open situations

- Closed situations:
  - Enemy of a player's tactical development
  - Very important in order to acquire a sound technique necessary for the development of tactics.
- Half Open:
  - Drills should start with serve and return.
- Open
- Coaches should opt for a well-balanced choice between these 3 forms of drills

# 14 & Under Tactical Development

## How to do it?

### Ball control

- Need to use the kinetic chain efficiently
- Know that each player has an optimal maximum speed to maintain control over the shots
- Junior players try to play the game the way the professional tennis players play it
- They lack a professional's technique and power

# 14 & Under Tactical Development

## How to do it?



### Anticipation

- Extremely important factor
- Crucial in today's aggressive tennis game
- Only be achieved when players have good ball control
- The 14/U player has to be able to:
  - Control the ball sufficiently
  - Pull his opponent off balance, out of the court, etc.
  - Create a situation where he can finish off the point himself

# 14 & Under Tactical Development

## How to do it?

### Theoretical understanding

- Of all tactical options
- Prepare the player to make the correct decisions independently during match play.
- Drills for 14/U players should provide them the necessary theoretical understanding
- This will help them to reach tactical maturity later
- The intellectual understanding of the game should be properly trained.

# 14 & Under Tactical Development

## How to do it?

### Analysis and adaptation

- Analysing opponents and adapting the game plan to the opponent's game style, strengths and weaknesses
- Match intelligence should be developed from the very beginning
- Need to intelligent players and fast decision makers





# Tactical development 18 & Under

# Tactical development 18 & Under

## Individualisation



- Work the individual's tactical way of playing
- Player should be able to:
  - Evaluate himself
  - Draw upon a list of his own strengths and weaknesses
  - Determine the individual tactical style
  - Work on individual weapons:
    - Chip and charge
    - Using the slice specifically
    - Drop shot
  - Make things more difficult for the opponent to anticipate.

# Tactical development 18 & Under Fundamentals

- Whatever the game style will be:
  - The serve should always be developed in a way that allows the player to dominate the service games
  - The forehand should be used to put pressure on the opponent
  - Play the return and passing shots as aggressively as possible

# Tactical development 18 & Under Fundamentals



## Tactical aggressiveness

- When the player has acquired the necessary strength
- All tactical situations will be shaped by:
  - More aggressive strokes
  - Winners
  - Approach shots
- Greater tactical aggressiveness than during the 14/U age

# Tactical development 18 & Under

## Other important issues



### **Weaknesses**

- In tennis, points are made with weapons
- Still work on the weaknesses
- It is just as important to work out the tactical game such that the weaknesses will be the cause of very few problems

# Tactical development 18 & Under

## Other important issues

### Improving the standard of the returns

- All top players do indeed return very well
- Serve is practised considerably more than the return
- Return is practised:
  - Largely in a closed situation
  - Does not improve anticipation at all
- Players should practice the return in a more appropriate way to better develop it for match play.

# Tactical development 18 & Under

## Other important issues

### Adapting to the tactical style to the opponent

- It is impossible to change the player's tactical style
- Automated decision making
- Much better to use the player's own weapons
- To impose the style on the opponent
- Always room for some small adaptations to the opponent's game style but no more than that

# Tactical development 18 & Under

## Other important issues

### Adapting the tactical style to the court

- Same as before
- I.e. A baseline player will not come to the net all the time on grass, but, if he has developed his game broadly in the younger age categories, he will do so a little bit more often than on slower courts.



# Tactical development 18 & Under

## Other important issues

### Extreme situations

- The 18/U players play more and more aggressively
- Solving extreme situations in an aggressive way should be practised on a regular basis.

# Tactical development 18 & Under

## Other important issues

### Tactical situation against opponent's specific technical characteristics

- A player should learn how to take advantage of his opponent's technical characteristics
- Examples:
  - Keeping the ball low against full western grips
  - Reading the serve through the toss of the ball.

# Tactical development 18 & Under

## Other important issues



### How to play in windy conditions

- With the wind:
  - Play more aggressively
  - Approach the net more often
  - Use topspin in order to control the ball
- Against the wind:
  - Keep length in both serve and return
  - Prevent the opponent from dominating too much

# Tactical development 18 & Under

## Other important issues



### How to play in the sun

- Adapt serve decisions:
  - I.e. use more topspin on his first serve if this toss alleviates any problems he is having with the sun
- Put pressure on the server according to the position of the sun.



# Other Tactical Developmental Issues

# Some Tactical differences between Juniors and Professionals

	Professionals	Juniors
<b>Understanding:</b> Adequate reading of the opponent's intention which facilitates anticipation.	Basic. The speed of the game means that a lack of this is a limiting factor.	Important but not decisive.
<b>Selection:</b> Execution of the appropriate shot in each game situation.	Very important.	It is not a determining factor.
<b>Versatility:</b> Ability to adapt to the characteristics of the opponent, court, ball...	Very important. Progressively more important due to the ATP ranking system.	It is of relative importance.
<b>Consistency:</b> Ability to play with intensity and concentration throughout the whole match.	Indispensable at the highest level (note: the change of Agassi).	It can be compensated for.

# Fundamental tactical questions

- How do I win points?
- How do I set up the situation to win points the way I want to?
- How is my opponent winning points?
- What can I do to defend against, or actually turn around the effective patterns of my opponent?
- What is Plan B and when do I go to it?

# The tactical road to the top: with experience the player...



- Begins to understand how to win points and avoid losing them.
- Recognises and adjusts to offensive, neutral and defensive situations quickly
- Creates openings that can be attacked



# The tactical road to the top: with experience the player...



- Learns to make the opponent play very well in order to beat them
- Learns to be “coachable” to master the tactical elements of the game
- Wants to receive and implement advice from a credible coach and still be independent