



courtesy of USTA

Getting Parents Involved in Tennis

Read through the two scenarios on the next page and decide which you like best.

by Patricia Egart

PTR Certified, Patricia was a physical education teacher with a degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She worked for the USTA Northern for eight years, where she started collegiate and corporate team programs. An avid player, who has coached high school teams for 15 years, Patricia has three children who play tennis. Her real passion is sharing the game with children. In 1999, Patricia founded Minnesota's Anoka Ramsey Youth Tennis and directs the program that sees more than 400 kids age 3-18 each year. In 2007, Anoka Ramsey was chosen to be a QuickStart pilot program. Patricia has also coached a team at the USTA Jr. Team Tennis National Championships.

Scenario 1

Mom drops Johnny off at the club for tennis then disappears to run errands or go workout. You never meet or even see the parent of this kid who is in your tennis program. Mom has no clue what Johnny has been doing for six weeks.

Scenario 2

Mom is required to participate in the very first tennis session. You provide a racquet for her to use and she gets an introduction to the game. You provide her with information on what her child is learning, as well as fun activities she and her child can do to practice and play tennis together. You ask her to play tennis with her child at least once a week.

The next thing you know, Mom is renting a court once a week and playing tennis with Johnny. Then, Mom is signing up for her own tennis lessons. She is buying equipment and clothing at your pro shop. And, sure enough, Dad is joining in. You also notice the kids in your program are catching on to tennis very quickly due to the extra time on the court, and they are eager to move up to the next level your club offers.

You get the picture. I am sure we all agree that Scenario 2 is best. It's a fact that the more family members who play tennis, the more likely a youngster is going to keep playing tennis. A family provides built in practice partners, built in doubles partners and built in opponents.

I wanted to see Scenario 2 happen at the community based athletic association tennis program I direct. I have always been a bit jealous of parental involvement in other sports. I see parents setting up cones for soccer, chalking lines for softball, and organizing carwashes to support football. I see mothers sporting "Hockey Mom" hats.

It occurred to me that if parents understood what their children were learning and were more informed about tennis, perhaps they would take a greater interest and become more involved. Maybe they would understand why Johnny won a "Longest Rally of the Day" or a "Happy Feet" sticker. Maybe they would stay around and actually *watch*, instead of peeking up from their book occasionally. And, maybe I would even start to see mothers wearing "Tennis Mom" hats!

Over the years, parents have been asking me for some information to take home so they could keep playing tennis with their kids. I looked for books and found none. I sat down and started writing what I thought would be a comprehensive handout that would be simple enough for both parents and children. I realized I needed illustrations. The handout turned into a 32 page book, *Let's Play Tennis for Parents and Kids by Andy Ace*.

Here is how I implement Scenario 2 in my program!

I always require a parent meeting at the beginning of each session. I use an online registration system with a broadcast email program. An email is sent to all parents to inform them of the meeting and to tell them to come dressed for tennis, as they will be expected to join in. I borrow adult racquets from the USTA section office or my club's pro shop. The parents and their kids will be on the court together, will rotate from court to court, and will experience a combination of skill based drills, footwork and game activities conducted by our high school tennis players who serve as coaches. I select a few of my favorite activities that are suitable for large groups.

Court 1 - Stuffed Shirt Game

The coach demonstrates the ready position and a controlled forehand. Players are placed on two, three or four teams, depending upon numbers, and line up at the service line. One parent from each team is designated Team Captain. The Captain, with his or her shirt tucked in, is positioned at the net across from her team. The Captain uses an underhand toss to her team member's forehand side. Players hit balls to their Captain, who will try to catch the balls and stuff them in her shirt. At the end of the game, the team with the most balls in their Captain's shirt wins.

Court 2 - The Footwork Court The Line Game

Teach players the parts of the court, then challenge them with, "Who wants to be the last one... to the baseline... to the net... to the ad singles sideline... to the service line... to the deuce doubles sideline... to the ad alley... to the deuce service box...?" and so on. No one wants to be last! Add footwork and have players cross step or shuffle. This is a fun way to learn the parts of the court.

Ball Race

Players place their racquets on the deuce court doubles sideline. The children place three balls on the opposite ad court doubles sideline, and the parents set four balls on the opposite ad court doubles sideline. Players start next to their racquets. On, "Go," players run to retrieve one ball at a time and place them on their racquet. The first player with all their balls on their racquet wins.

Court 3 - Jacks

Parent and child are positioned across the net from each other. At first, they stand one racquet distance apart and try to rally, hitting three times in a row without missing. After they succeed, they both take a racquet length step back and continue until a pair reaches the service line.

Court 4 - Back of the Bus Volleys

The coach demonstrates a forehand volley. Children are in line on one side of the net opposite a parent who is on other side with a ball hopper. Designate one end of the line as the front of the bus and the other end as the back of the bus. Parents take turns using an underhand toss to feed balls to players. If a player gets the ball

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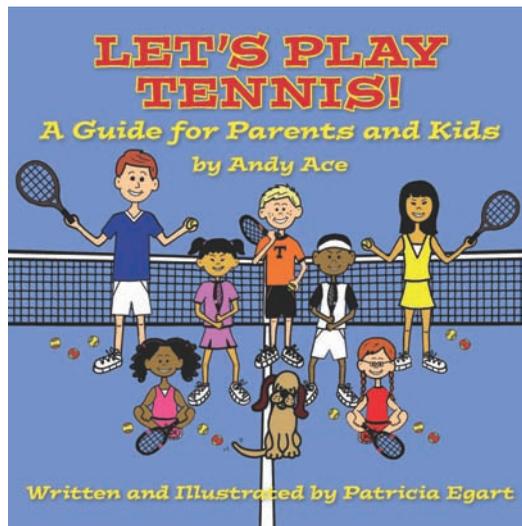
over the net and in, they stay in their place. If they miss the volley, they move to the back of the bus, and players shift up one spot. The player at the front of the bus at the end of the game is the winner.

Court 5 - Sharks and Fishes

Players (Fish) line up in the ad alley near the service line. Younger players may be closer to the net. The coach feeds a ball to the player's forehand, but toward the T. The first player runs to hit it over net and in (or just over net depending upon level). If successful, they are still a Fish. If a player misses twice, they become a Shark. Sharks put down their racquet by the net and go to other side. Sharks have to catch a ball in air (or after one bounce or two bounces depending on level) to become a Fish again. A player who hits a ball that is caught also becomes a Shark. The game continues until one Fish is left and s/he hits the ball in without it being caught.

At the end of the session, the group convenes. I ask every parent and child to play tennis together at least once a week. To illustrate, I compare it to playing catch if their child were in a baseball or softball program. They may play driveway tennis or play at the local courts. I also give each family a copy of my book to use as a guide.

Take advantage of the power of **family** to grow tennis in your club or community!



The book is available to clubs, community associations, and parks and recreation departments at bulk prices. Customization of the inside front and back covers is available for orders of 1,000. Call 763-438-8466 or email andy@andyacetennis.com for pricing. To view sample pages and read reviews, visit www.andyacetennis.com

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