

Understanding Red, Orange and Green And Junior Competition

Red Tennis- A Quick Guide!



Red is the first stage of Mini Tennis. Allowing players to quickly serve, rally and score.

Age

Primarily for children aged up to 8 years old but can be played by all ages in a fun, social environment.

Court

Size is 11-12m long x 5-6m wide and the net is 80cm high.

Balls & Rackets

Both Red foam or felt balls can be used, both of these Red balls are larger than orange, green or standard yellow balls, and are around 75% slower than a normal ball. The maximum size of rackets or bats is 23", players aged 5-7 may be better suited to either a 19" or 21" racket, dependent on their size and strength.

Scoring

Tie breaks to 7 or 10 points are the primary scoring format, though lower numbers can be used. More experienced players may progress to play best of 3 tie breaks to 7, while timed matches up to 15 minutes are also suitable and easier to organise.

Competition Format

Children should start competing in teams using formats with lots of short matches for every player. Doubles can be introduced for seven-year-olds and older, but at ages below this, it can be difficult for children to cooperate. For very young children, competition can be presented through stations and multi skills. Events are ideally just 1-3 hours long.

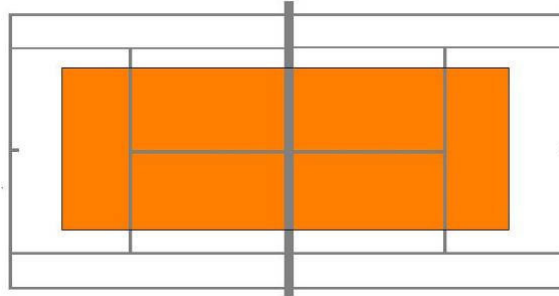
Location of Competition

As much as possible, competition should be based at the home club in familiar surroundings. As children grow in confidence, they may be encouraged to play in other locations close to their home venue.

Lesson Content

Players start by working on building a rally, then simple tactical and technical development with an emphasis on serving, rallying and playing the game. The key at Red is to do simple things very well and teach technical skills that are relevant for the tactical situations that a player will encounter in Red Tennis.

Orange Tennis - A Quick Guide!



At Orange, players coming from Red apply all the skills they've learned to play the game on a bigger court with a faster ball. Older beginners starting out may also start in Orange rather than Red, simply because they are big enough to cover the larger court.

Age

Ideally, players with experience at Red level will graduate to this level at the age of 8 or 9. Some children who come later to the game may play Orange until they are 10 or 11.

Court

The Orange court is 18m x 6.5m (as shown) or 8.23m (full court width); the net is 80cm high.

Balls and Rackets

The Orange ball is the same size as the yellow ball but is approximately 50% slower, and bounces lower.

On this court, a racket between 23" and 25" should be used.

Scoring

As players are likely to be older and more used to playing in competitions, a longer duration is generally used, with a best of 3 tie breaks, or 1 x short set to 4 games format being recommended.

Competition Format

Children continue to participate in team-based competition, with singles and doubles in short matches. The players who are more confident may now want to play more individual competition. Most formats are between 2-4 hours long.

Competition Location

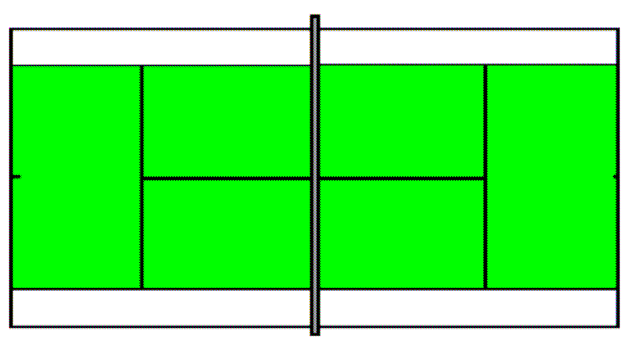
You should ensure that a good balance of competition is provided at the home venue as this will allow players who are unsure of their level of commitment to the game to continue to

compete. Players may travel short distances from their home venue more frequently, to play in events.

Lesson Content

Children start playing the game in all areas of the court by coming to the net, learning to attack and defend, and applying their existing skills to the bigger court. The game becomes more dynamic for those players who have progressed from Red but there should still be a strong emphasis on developing core skills in lessons and allowing players to develop other skills through frequent play. Exposure to match play also means that players will start to develop a greater tactical understanding.

Green Tennis – A Quick Guide!



Green is the final stage before using the yellow ball. As well as providing an ideal opportunity to check that all the basic tennis skills are in place before moving on to the yellow ball, it is also the stage where players should be challenged in all areas of the court, with balls bouncing at a variety of heights and speeds.

Age

Players at Green are usually 9 to 10 years old. This, of course, depends on ability and on the age at which a child started to play. The important thing, as with all the stages, is that children should not progress too soon. As with all stages, there may also be older players using the Green ball.

Court

Green is the same as a full-size court. Players should only move to this court size when they are physically ready.

Balls and Rackets

The green ball is approximately 25% slower than the yellow ball and will bounce higher than the orange ball.

Players should use a racket between 25" and 26" in length and with an even balance.

Scoring

1 x short set to 4 games or best of 3 short sets are used at this stage. It is still acceptable to use other shorter scoring formats for less confident players who may enjoy this more than the more serious or formal events.

Competition Format

Children will still enjoy team formats and doubles, but players will be playing more individual events than at the previous two stages. Events are between 3 hours and 1 day.

Competition Location

Competition is still provided at the home venue as this will allow players who are unsure of their level of commitment to the game to continue to compete. More frequently, players may travel short distances from their home venue to play in events, with some playing regional events, and a very small minority playing national events.

Lesson Content

With the full size court, the demands of tennis competition mean that players need the physical skills to cover the court and control the body in this dynamic environment. Tactically players should understand and make logical decisions from different areas of the court based upon their own position, the oncoming ball and the position of the opponent. In preparing players for competition it is also important to encourage children to be more independent, including understanding about warming up, practising, fitness and health.

Moving on to Tennis with the Yellow Ball

There is no designated age at which a player should move to the yellow ball; on average children tend to be ready for the full game around 10 – 12 years old, if they have progressed through the three stages of Mini Tennis. More able children who appear to be good enough to play full tennis earlier may move through earlier, but there is still a benefit in continuing to play with the Green ball to encourage good technical and tactical development, and having children compete where they feel challenged but not overwhelmed is crucial to keeping players in the game.

Through a Child's Eyes

Just as technical and tactical skills can develop and progress, a player's competitive journey from a young age may follow similar lines. The demands of the game, the player's needs (both physical and emotional), the coach's role, and parents' behaviour are all important in the process. We have to also consider how the child understands competition process will also gradually mature and how all these factors will combine to have a major impact on a child's enjoyment of the game. Each child's motivation to compete varies. Some seem innately comfortable competing, while others shy away from competitive situations. Children do change and develop, and the influences around them can encourage or discourage this competitive orientation. Rather than consider withdrawing them from competition:

- Ensure that it is appropriate - duration, format and location.
 - Emphasise that performing the skills is more important than the outcome.
 - Recognise the effort and commitment that they make.
 - Make them understand that the outcome does not impact on how we feel about them.
- Children will still reflect on the results, and may cry or get upset, when they lose. This is part of learning about winning and losing. The key is not to make the situation worse by presenting competition in a way that is inappropriate for their emotional and physiological age, or spending time dwelling on the result. The best way to get a child to enjoy competition is to present a pathway of experiences that gradually increases the challenge and ownership of the performance. This should start in lessons by performing tasks that are measurable, playing points and being placed in competitive situations.

Effort and Ability

To really see a child's view we also need to consider the way in which they view competition with particular reference to the issue of effort and ability. This is particularly important as children cannot fully differentiate between effort and ability until a later age; and as a consequence they:

- struggle to separate the result from their own performance or themselves
- believe that the result was down to their own efforts or lack of them
- believe that if they lose today and try harder next time that they can win
- are more likely to get very happy or very upset by a result
- may get upset even when the opponent plays really well

Statements like "it's not fair; he was too good" and "next time I'll try harder and win" are not uncommon, so listening to what children say when they speak about competition gives you a good view of how they see it.

Building a Competitive Pathway



Competition can be fun for all children if it is at the appropriate level. The most important thing to remember is that it has to suit the maturity and tennis experience of the player and be organised with the right approach. Children can progress along a progressive, competitive journey in the same way that they develop their skills and competence. There are many ways to involve and inspire children in competitions. Different formats and themes can be used to maintain children's interest and excitement. Lower ability players or those who devote less time to tennis may prefer to only play in their club environment, while keener and more able children can compete on a more regular basis in inter-club events, as well as intra-club events. Like all skills, children develop competitiveness at different rates so be sure not to push any child into a competition that they don't feel ready for, even if you know the child is the required standard. A child's level of competitiveness is often closely linked more to their own perception of their competence rather than their actual competence. Learning to compete is best done first in familiar surroundings before going further afield.

Why Competition is Essential?

Competing is at the heart of children's sport, including tennis. The vast majority of young players aspire to improve their game and compete in appropriate surroundings. This is important for players because, appropriate competition:

- Makes learning meaningful
- Provides a measure of improvement, and a value to coaching
- Assists mental and competitive development

- Teaches respect for others, the game and the understanding of rules
- Gives a sense of achievement and aids progress
- Motivates all players and in particular identifies those with a specific talent for the game
- Provides an off court social element which is also enjoyable

Fear and Fair

The two key words to remember when thinking about how to make competition more appealing to young players are 'fear' and 'fair'. In the child's mind you must reduce the 'Fear' and ensure things are 'Fair'. If you can control these two factors then more children will enjoy the competitive experience. Managing fear means that you ensure that:

- Parents and coaches react positively no matter what the result
 - Results are not considered a big issue whether they are victories or defeats
 - There are not major prizes for events, although small ones are fine
 - You do not raise the expectations of the player by expecting them to win
 - All observers maintain positive body language and help contribute to a positive atmosphere
- Managing fair means that you ensure that:

- Players feel that they have a chance of meeting the expectations of parents, coaches, and friends
- Players are all of approximately the same level
- Players have a chance to see the experience as worthwhile
- Players are not asked to play to the point where they are too exhausted to compete at their best

The Challenges of the Tennis Format

The game has mental challenges like:

- It's never over until it's over (you can be ahead and still lose or be behind and win)
 - There is no time limit
 - There is no immediate way of telling how well you played (it's not like golf or track where times or scores tell you how you performed irrespective of the result)
 - Best of 3, means that you can win even when you lost the first set
 - The match is split up into small blocks that keep restarting; points make up games and games make up sets
 - You can win more points than your opponent and still lose
 - Some points are more important than others, for example, game point or break point
- Remember that we take these elements for granted, but children may find them challenging and frustrating.

Player and Parent Code of Conduct



Junior Code of Conduct

Our aim is always to provide a professional, safe and fun environment for all competitors and their guests. Required behaviour for all events is as follows:

During Matches

- Treat opponents with respect
- Call the score after each point
- Abide by the score and lines calls when called by an umpire or scorer
- Treat the court, equipment and facilities with respect
- During matches remain on court unless organiser agrees to a toilet break
- Abide by the rules of the facility for what liquids are allowed on court
- Call the organiser when you can't agree the score or have another dispute that can't be agreed
- Report results at the end of the match to the organiser

Between Matches

- Treat facilities with respect at all times
- Place bags and equipment in the appropriate area
- Be respectful to other players, parents and organisers

Parents Code of Conduct

We want your child to enjoy the event. Creating too much pressure or expectation can make competition an unpleasant experience.

Parents are therefore asked to:

- Comment positively on your child's performance
- Refrain from interfering with scoring or line calling (unless acting as an agreed scorer for other matches)
- Show respect for your child's opponent, parents and competition organiser / referee
- Refrain from calling out other than to offer encouragement during the matches
- Refrain from coaching your child during matches
- Remain off court at all times

We want to create an environment where children can enjoy competition and be rewarded for their efforts. The purpose of these events is to create a platform for players to be introduced to competition at a level suitable for their age and understanding. By doing this we hope that more children will feel confident to progress to events outside the club and continue to happily compete for the rest of their lives.

The Best Reward

Although children are motivated by awards, the best and most sustainable reward is your recognition of their efforts and achievements. Never forget to congratulate them, encourage them and thank them. Long-term, this can mean much more, and may keep children in the game longer than awards and prizes.

Acknowledgement is made to the International Tennis Federation Tennis 10-Steps Manuals as a source for much of the information in this document.