

# Quality Tennis Warm Up

## VTV Feest van de Jeugd 2008

### Introduction

The on-court tennis specific warm-up is an important part of any practice as it sets the tone for the entire practice. The challenge for the coach is to maximize this period by progressively addressing specific goals both for the outcome (number of shots with a specific goal...) as for the process that is responsible for this (at the tactical, technical, physical and psychological levels). It is the ideal time to develop and/or maintain fundamentals.

We will present the outcomes for an on-court tennis specific warm-up routine for competitive level players, which will include a detailed description of each drill in the routine and the associated 'checklist' of elements a coach can focus on.

The content for the process will be addressed during the next series of visits.

This document is organized as follows:

- Section 1: Purpose and General Considerations of a Tennis Specific Warm-Up
- Section 2: Detailed Description of a Competitive Players Tennis Specific Warm-up Routine

## **Section 1: Purpose and General Considerations of a Tennis Specific Warm-Up**

### **Purpose of the Warm-up**

The physical warm-up will precede the tennis specific warm-up and will be used to ensure that the players are physically prepared for training when they step onto the court.

By ensuring a good physical warm-up, you will be able to accomplish much more during the tennis specific warm-up. It is an excellent coaching habit to use the tennis specific warm-up as an opportunity to maintain fundamentals and develop skills. The skills maintained will respond well to consistent reinforcement (since most programs include a tennis specific warm-up every session).

When working with competitive juniors, the setting and accomplishing of goals is important. By setting achievable and challenging goals and advising on how to reach them, the coach helps the players become goal oriented. The players learn to strive for excellence and achieve tasks.

### **Outcome and Process Goals**

There are two types of goals that can be set. “Outcome” goals are ones that have to do with the final result of the ball (its height, direction, distance, speed and spin), and consistency (e.g. 10 in a row, etc). They are the ‘tactics’ or task a player is trying to achieve.

“Process” goals are the things a player does to achieve the outcome. Process goals can be Psychological (e.g. eyes focused on ball at impact), Physical (e.g. feet moving), or Technical (e.g. Low to high racquet path).

### **Global Goals**

The on-court tennis specific warm-up sets the tone for the lesson and helps to steer all the ‘Global’ components (Psychological, Physical, Tactical, Technical) into the right direction. For example, a good warm-up can include the following Global elements:

<b>Tactical</b>	<b>Psychological</b>	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Technical</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a specific intention for shots (decision-making)</li><li>• Develop problem solving when tasks are not achieved</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appropriate ‘arousal’ level and intensity</li><li>• Appropriate focus</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coordinate specific movement patterns</li><li>• Appropriate muscle relaxation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop and/or maintain basic technical elements</li><li>• Set timing and feeling for the day</li></ul>

Typically, when coaches talk about a warm-up, they mean warming up physically. When they refer to ‘fundamentals’ they mean technical elements. Expanding the view and definition of warm-up and fundamentals to include all the Global categories will increase the benefits of the warm-up dramatically.

## Coaches Role

When working with players (especially developing juniors), it is important to sell the importance of developing great practice habits. Practice makes *permanent*. The things a player repeats become ingrained (whether bad or good). To accomplish these things, it is important for the coach to be an excellent motivator. To be positive and demanding at the same time. They need to be able to coax the best performance out of each individual.

It is also critical that a coach work hard in the warm-up. All too often, coaches ‘tune out’ or think about the lesson to come. The coach must be in a constant state of analyzing. Is the performance acceptable? Are they achieving the goals? If not, are the goals not correct or do they just need more help?

For maximum effect, the coach should only emphasize **one thing at a time**. There are many elements to incorporate however, avoid spraying out everything at once (e.g. “remember to turn, keep your feet moving, impact out front, step heel to toe, etc.) Mentioning many elements (even if they are correct) doesn’t help students retain the fundamentals.

Scan the group to see what is good, determine what is the biggest priority to help them achieve the goal and highlight it. One good idea is to have a priority that carries through all the drills (e.g. today we will emphasize the impact point in every situation).

Regardless of what objective is chosen, the coach must ensure the fundamentals are not just known and understood by the players, but that they can perform them consistently and on demand. Remember, without maintenance, all skills will degrade in time.

## **Section 2: Detailed Description of Competitive Players Tennis Specific Warm-up Routine**

### **COMPETITIVE PLAYER ROUTINE**

The routine we will present here is a ‘maintenance’ version that would typically be used in junior competitive academy training sessions. This routine is only one of many possibilities. These have been chosen because they cover many of the most common shots/tasks that players need to master at the competitive level.

#### **Maintenance Routine:**

##### **Groundstrokes:**

Drill #1: Baseline to Baseline Neutral Rally (down-the-line)

Drill #2: Baseline to Baseline Neutral Rally (crosscourt)

Drill #3: Attacking Forehand to Defensive Baseline Groundstroke

##### **Volleys:**

Drill #4: Volleys to Groundstrokes

There are a number of ways the routine can be modified to achieve different goals:

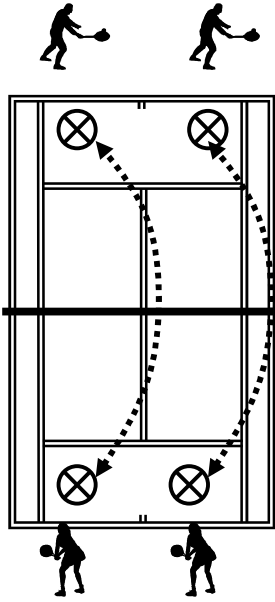
- **“Quick start” version (15-20 minutes):** In this version, the idea is to have a thorough preparation for a lesson. The time spent on each drill would be very short (1-2 minutes). Some drills could even be skipped or not done every session (e.g. overheads every 2<sup>nd</sup> session alternating with slice drill). Keep in mind that even though this is a quick version, the coach should still be emphasizing achieving goals and maintaining fundamentals. Quick doesn’t mean purposeless and ‘sloppy’.
- **Extended “skill development” session (30-45 minutes):** Here, the coach goes through the warm-up skills with a view to enhance each skill or focus on a particular one. For example, if the overheads are seen to be deficient, the session would be stopped and the overhead would become the main focus. Once the skill is mastered, it is incorporated back into the warm-up routine for maintenance. This might be more commonly used in the preparatory phase, especially at the beginning of the season.

## Drill #1: BASELINE to BASELINE RALLY (down-the-line)

**Purpose:** To practice a quality rally (neutral) ball. The ball must be rising when it reaches our partner who is positioned 4-6 feet behind the baseline. If the trajectory of the ball is dropping when it reaches our partner, it presents an attacking opportunity that opponents could capitalize on in a match. At first in the warm-up, this can be accomplished through high arcing balls... as the warm-up progresses the balls should be hit with more speed. **Note: The groundstroke rally shot is a critical foundation on which other groundstrokes (attacking, countering, etc.) can be built.**

### Tactical goals:

- Maintain a “Quality” rally that keeps the opponent neutral (a ball that is rising as it reaches the partner standing 4-6 feet behind the baseline). Any combination of speed, height, spin or distance that achieves the task is acceptable (as long as it does not look like “attacking”).
- Maintain a medium arced trajectory
- Appropriate consistency (count how many sets of 10 quality rallies, etc.)

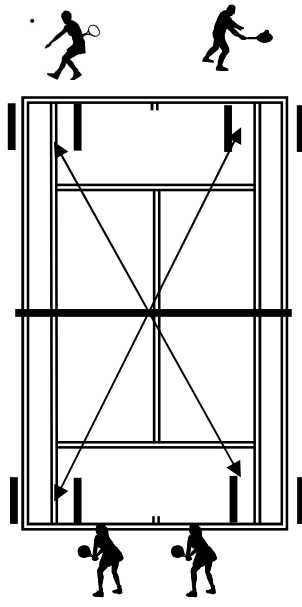
Court set-up (down-the-line)	Considerations/Comments/Priorities
	<p>Are the players rallying consistently with a focused intention for every shot? Are they adjusting their position to achieve the best impact or just hitting ‘whatever’? The most common challenges in a groundstroke rally warm-up are inconsistency and players hitting purposeless balls. Maintain focus, consistency and purpose by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining all the <b>global elements</b> you have previously set-up in the serviceline rally.</li> <li>• <b>Position:</b> 4-6 feet behind baseline to promote an upward trajectory for depth and net clearance and because high tempo rallies are played from this position during a match</li> <li>• <b>Timing:</b> A consistent impact from ball to ball. (a focused awareness of where this impact is)</li> <li>• Maintaining consistency on a <b>high bouncing ball:</b> High arcing balls are problematic to receive since they may bounce above shoulder height. If players can not handle this ball from their normal rallying position, they should either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move forward to prevent the ball from bouncing over their shoulder (hitting on the rise)</li> <li>• Move back and let the ball drop to take between shoulder and waist level (hitting the ball on the decline)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Mechanics:</b> Smooth, effortless swing (minimal muscle tension)</li> </ul>

## Drill #2: BASELINE to BASELINE RALLY (crosscourt)

**Purpose:** A Crosscourt exchange is critical to keep opponents 'pinned' in a corner. This will also help develop directional control while rallying. Balls that land too much in the centre of the court 'open up' the court for an opponent to make you move

**Tactical goals:**

- Maintain all the goals of the down-the-line rally
- Place markers 'one step' from singles sideline and one step outside the doubles alley to identify where the crosscourt shot should pass through and accompanying recovery position. Markers will help players place the ball at the appropriate diagonal angle

Court set-up (crosscourt)	Considerations/Comments/Priorities
	<p>Are the players controlling the direction of the ball well enough to keep their opponent's to the side of the court?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The crosscourt rally includes all the elements found in the down-the-line version. The key difference is the direction control and positioning for lateral recovery.</li> <li>• <b>Improving Direction control:</b> Ensure players have a 'Hitting zone' (extended time the racquet is at the proper angle through the impact) to control the direction</li> <li>• <b>Recovery:</b> Bisect the angle of the opponent's shot. Players should recover just to the 'inside' (more to the centre of the court) of the markers near closest to the centre mark</li> </ul> <p>Note: in order to ensure proper focus in hitting and recovery, use markers to show where players need to recover to by the time their partner hits.</p>



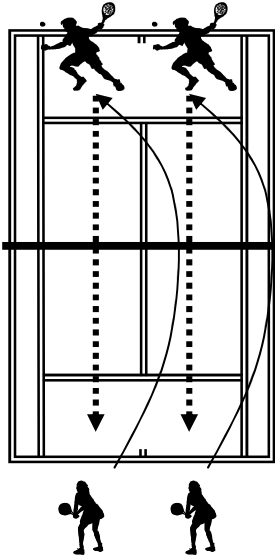
User of markers  
(target and recovery)

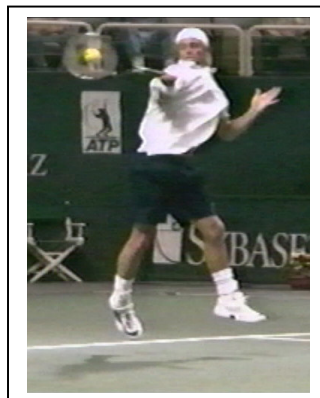
### Drill #3: ATTACKING FOREHAND to DEFENSIVE GROUNDSTROKE

**Purpose:** To practice taking control of the point by attacking balls that are shorter and weaker with a strong forehand. The other side of the tactic is to practice defending against these forehand attacks. At first, players can just practice the attack (with the partner stopping the ball). As the drill progresses, the defender can try to keep the ball going by consistently blocking the ball back.

**Tactical goals:**

- Attacker: Trajectory of the ball needs to be leveled and still rising when it reaches the partner positioned approximately 10 feet behind baseline
- Defender: Place ball to  $\frac{3}{4}$  court with a high arced trajectory so the attacker can take it inside the baseline at shoulder height

Court set-up	Considerations/Comments/Priorities
	<p>Are the attackers balancing power with consistency? Are they just 'smacking' the ball wildly or smoothly maintaining a fast racquet speed?</p> <p><b>Attacker:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have an intention of 'forcing' and gaining advantage rather than hitting an outright winner</li> <li>• Move into court and take the ball in front of baseline</li> <li>• Prepare racquet at shoulder height to take ball at shoulder height with a level swing</li> <li>• Use a neutral or semi-open stance as it will help prepare the player to 'throw' the right side of the body (right handers) at the ball to generate power and level out the swing</li> <li>• Focus on full shoulder rotation to level out trajectory. Don't let players stroke with just their arms</li> </ul> <p><b>Defender:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Get every ball back" attitude</li> <li>• Shorten preparation to time reception of a power ball</li> <li>• Either block the ball back or hit a slower, high rallying ball back to set-up your partner</li> </ul>



## Drill #4: VOLLEYS to GROUNDSTROKES

**Purpose:** To maintain a cooperative volley to groundstroke rally.

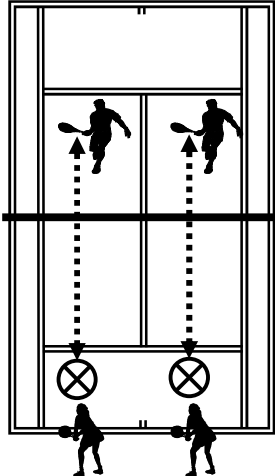
**Tactical goals:**

Volleyer:

- Practice the volley received at the net (position halfway between the net and serviceline) and send a  $\frac{3}{4}$  court ball with a low arced trajectory. The baseliner should not have to move inside the baseline to take the ball.

Groundstroker:

- Keep ball below shoulder level of volleyer so that in a real match situation they would not be able to easily put the ball away

Court set-up	Considerations/Comments/Priorities
	<p>Are the players being cooperative? Help the consistency and cooperation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus by counting sets of 10, 20, etc. or rally for a time period (e.g. 30 seconds – 2 minutes)</li> </ul> <p><b>Volleyer:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recovery back after volley</li> <li>• ‘Heel to toe’ footwork action to transfer weight forward in a balanced manner</li> <li>• Use a “Catching” action to control the ball</li> </ul> <p><b>Groundstroker:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track the ball and adjust forward or back (no 2 bounce or half volleys)</li> <li>• Setup and recover quickly while staying low</li> <li>• Full shoulder rotation to level out trajectory</li> </ul>



Volley to Groundstrokes