



## **'Girls only teen tennis' - advice for places to play**

**Principles that should inform each session:**

- 1) Hitting a ball and chasing it has MEANING in itself for many boys but not for most girls. Teamwork and communication to achieve a goal does have MEANING to girls so emphasis needs to be given to teamwork, tactics and communication in each session.**
- 2) The program is designed to achieve a social end of girls playing in a fun supportive environment NOT a performance one.**
- 3) The session belongs to the girls so it must have democratic CHOICES as to what they do included in each session.**

**Coaching tips:**

- (A) Try consciously to DEBLOKE your language (even if you are a woman). So use female sporting figures as examples and don't use male-focused examples on the assumption they know what you are talking about. The obvious one here that loads of coaches do is using throwing a rugby ball as an example of the motion for a backhand or forehand. Most girls haven't thrown a rugby ball so use maybe the mini tennis idea of an elephant trunk or better yet show them how to throw a Rugby ball and maybe build up their throwing actions rather than assuming it is there already.
- B) Try to do SOCIAL warm ups and warm downs. Tennis doesn't seem to do mixes of static and dynamic warmup or rather often misunderstands (sporty boys may not stand still for long but girls generally can) the social/physical aspect of mixing in static warmups so do some static stretching while introducing the session in between dynamic elements of the warm up. Talk to them about the session and their choices (see below).
- C) Democracy emphasis in drills - give them choices of drills so- plan for crossroads in the session. Be prepared to ADAPT to what they want to do.
- D) Girls are capable of more TATICAL work so not so much 'go... go... go...' needed as with boys with limited concentration spans.
- E) Give them formal opportunities within the structure of the session to DISCUSS stuff? (how high is the net -middle -end? How long is the court diagonally/end to end? When would you use a drop shot? Anyone feel nervous when serving?)
- F) DOUBLES play only. Get them playing each other but coach and encourage communication between pairs - do not attempt to get them to play singles or force them to play singles. **This is much more important than you think.**

G) If enjoying themselves LET IT GO more than normally even though you may want to move on to something you had planned.

H) Girls can be quiet initially and this is not a bad sign as it's a matter of building confidence in the coach and the group, so take things SLOWLY at first.

I) GET THE RIGHT COACH (**This is vital and difficult**): Tennis coaches tend to be competitive male singles player who often think (conscious or unconscious) Girls/Women's tennis is inferior. Additionally they are not often "team" players so also think doubles is an inferior sport. In short the average male coach has not necessarily got the skills or understanding to run a Girls teen tennis session. Ideally get a woman coach who's up for doing things differently or a male coach who understands the issues (possibly one with a few daughters) or is just generally kind, empathetic, and has very good communication skills rather than high level performance technical coaching skills.

The above suggestions have all worked in Cambs and built up successful Girls only programmes from scratch. If you would like funding to help kick start such a programme, please email **Nick Tait at [nick.tait1@ntlworld.com](mailto:nick.tait1@ntlworld.com)**.