Tennis Ireland
Long Term Player Development Pathway

compiled by
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Introduction

I have compiled this manual using a combination of information sourced from the Tennis Ireland ‘Building Pathways’ Document, the Canadian Sport for Life Programme, Sport New Zealand’s Active Start Programme, Tennis Australia’s Player Development Programme and ITN Resources from the ITF’s website.

In addition, the following experts contributed towards the document:

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The purpose of the LTPDP is to provide a framework for all those involved in delivering the game of tennis at all levels in Ireland. It has been produced based on empirically and scientifically relevant information, which indicates when certain capacities may best be developed. The model looks to develop the individual by covering the tennis specific components of technical, tactical, physical and psychological areas, whilst intertwining the components of personal, lifestyle, parental, educative and competitive experiences.

The ten components of development have been chosen to holistically guide the development of the child/player. While the programme is very extensive, it has been designed to guide you in understanding the key skills to be developed at the different phases and to assist in developing a pathway of development for children, teenage and adult players.
In particular, the LTPDP will help:

- Make tennis enjoyable for the participant.
- Develop a pathway of development.
- Foster the development of great people who play this super game.
- Recruit and retain players of all standards within your programmes.
- Implement appropriate activities for the appropriate skill and age levels.
- Understand a player’s development in relation to their skills.

Irish tennis strives to attract more participants to our sport. At the same time we want to retain current players, and raise standards to the same par as the most successful tennis nations. Hence our mission statement “More players, better players, better structures”. We have over 80,000 players participating in tennis. Without the tremendous support and dedication to our great game by the Schools, Parks, Clubs, Coaches, Competition Organisers and Volunteers, we would not be able to achieve this level of participation or attract new members to the game. As stakeholders we must continue to deliver tennis in a way that will encourage participants to develop a love for this great sport and to have a lifelong involvement.

Roger Geraghty
Tennis Ireland Director of Development

NOTE: This document is available from the Tennis Ireland website www.tennisireland.ie. If you wish to follow the web links in this document, they are ‘live’ in the PDF version on the website.
The International Tennis Number (ITN)

What is the ITN?

The ITN is a number that represents a player’s general level of play. In time it is hoped that every tennis player in Ireland will have an ITN. Under this system players will be rated from ITN 1 to ITN 10. An ITN 1 represents a high level player (holding an ATP/WTA ranking or of an equivalent playing standard). An ITN 10 is a player who is starting to play competitively (can serve, rally and score) on a full court, using an ITF approved ball. The ITF has also developed 10.1 - 10.3 ratings to support the Red, Orange and Green modified programmes. To facilitate the rating of players the ITF has created a Description of Standards and an objective On Court Assessment test. Tennis Ireland has developed a guide for Irish players. A combination of these resources can be used to rate players in the absence of competition results.

Objectives and Benefits of the ITN

The ITF firmly believes that tennis rating systems, linked to a country’s competitive structure, can play a crucial part in increasing the number of people playing tennis. The International Tennis Rating system provides a method of rating skill levels of tennis players’ globally which can help:

- Encourage more players to play tennis.
- Unite tennis under a common rating language.
- Encourage nations to implement an international tennis rating system nationally.
- Promote a variety of tennis competition formats, which are linked to the tennis rating system.
- Give more options for finding compatible playing partners and therefore more enjoyable competitive play.
- Facilitate the movement of all levels of players between, clubs, counties and countries.
Ranking versus Rating

What is a rating and how does it differ from a ranking? A rating is a description of standards that is used to determine the general competitive level of a player. It groups players of a similar level together within a category or band. The most well known example of a global rating in sport is the golf handicap. The relative level of players within each band is not determined by the rating system. This is the role of a ranking system.

A ranking is a more accurate estimate of the relative standard of players, based usually upon specific tournament results or competitions. A ranking is a comparison of similarly ‘rated’ players based on results of players within a specific rating category. For example, in the ITN 1 rating category, ATP/WTA rankings would represent a ranking within this rating category. Or in the ITN 2 rating category, top 10 Men’s & Ladies Irish rankings would represent a ranking within this rating category.

FURTHER INFORMATION:
ITN Description of Standards
http://www.itftennis.com/shared/medialibrary/pdf/original/IO_3500_original.PDF

ITN Guide for Irish Competitive Players
http://www.tennisireland.ie/player_database/guide_for_irish_players

ITN On Court Assessment Guide
http://www.itftennis.com/shared/medialibrary/pdf/original/IO_2885_original.PDF
Tennis Ireland works closely with the International Tennis Federation, Tennis Coach Ireland and Coaching Ireland, to implement the highest possible standards of coaching in Irish tennis. We offer a variety of coaching levels aligned with the Long Term Player Development Programme (Pathway). Below is a description of the levels, and what the participants are qualified to do when they successfully complete each course. In addition, at each Phase of the Pathway, we have listed the minimum level of coach that should be deployed with the players associated with the phase.

Play and Stay Assistant
This person has undergone the requisite training process, involving a series of online learning tasks, and the completion of twenty logged hours practical experience under the guidance of a Tennis Ireland qualified coach.

Tennis Assistant 1
This person has completed the first Module of the Tennis Ireland Level 1 Coach Education Programme, and is qualified to assist a Tennis Ireland qualified coach with the implementation of the Red Programme in the club.

Tennis Assistant 2
This person has completed the second Module of the Tennis Ireland Level 1 Coach Education Programme, and is qualified to assist a Tennis Ireland qualified coach with the implementation of the Red, Orange and Green Programme in the club.

Level 1
This person has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 1 Coach Education Programme, and is qualified to work with and develop beginner to intermediate players of all ages and under 9 regional standard players.

Level 2
This person has completed The Tennis Ireland Level 2 Coach Education Programme, and is qualified to work with and develop intermediate to advanced players of all ages, and performance players up to 12 years of age.
**Level 3**

This person has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 3 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop players at all levels.

**Director of Tennis**

This person has taken part in the requisite training and is qualified to work as a Director of Tennis under the programme developed by Tennis Ireland.

*A Level 3 coach is qualified to work with players at all levels.*
An Overview of the Tennis Ireland Long Term Player Development Pathway

The following outlines the seven different phases of the Player Development Model.

**Phase 1:**
The Active Start Phase – NURTURE.
Age 0-5 years

The main objective of this phase is for children to be introduced to mainly unstructured, and some structured, active play that incorporates a variety of body movements. Children at this age need to develop the ABCs of movement – Agility, Balance, Coordination and Speed. The ABCs are essential for developing fundamental movement skills and fundamental movement skills will later provide the foundation for fundamental sport skills. Together, fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills form the basis of ‘physical literacy’.

An early active start enhances development of brain function, physical coordination, gross motor skills, posture and balance. An active start also helps children to build confidence, social skills, emotional control and imagination, whilst reducing stress and improving sleep. Children in the Active Start Phase should see physical activity as a fun and exciting part of everyday life.

Parents, guardians and minders have a big responsibility to provide daily opportunities for the children in their care. Daily active movement experiences dispersed throughout the child’s day provide optimum growing and learning development. Time is needed to learn Active Movement skills.

Avoid Inactivity. We know that many hours of TV/DVD watching and playing on computer and game consoles limits the development of the brain/body system as well as providing opportunities for extra food snacking. Set time limits and be selective. Participants should be introduced to the early part of the Tennis Ireland Skill Awards and progress at their own pace.
Phase 2:
The Fundamental Phase - EXPLORE.
Age: Males 6-9/Females 6-8 years

The main objective of this phase is to consolidate previously taught skills from the semi-structured Active Play Phase implemented by parents and guardians. Children should also learn all the fundamental movement skills, using a well-structured, positive and fun approach.

Tennis skills should be introduced, with an emphasis on fun, skill development and modified games through the Red and the early stage of the Orange programme. Appropriate and correct running, jumping and throwing techniques are taught using the ABC’s of athletics. Speed, power, strength and endurance are also developed. Participation in as many sports as possible is encouraged. The development of fundamental movement skills will contribute significantly to future player achievements. Participants should be introduced to the Tennis Ireland Skill Awards and progress through the Skills at their own pace. When they can complete the Skills in all five awards, participants should be introduced to the ITN 10.3.

Phase 3:
The Learning to Play & Practice Phase – ENCOURAGE.
Age: Males 9-12/Females 8-11 years

The objective of this phase is to consolidate and further develop previously taught skills. Children should also learn the specific tennis skills, in conjunction with the fundamental sports skills from a range of other sports. These skills form the cornerstones of all player development. Players make the transition from the Orange court and ball to the Green court and ball, then on to the yellow ball. This is why the Phase is divided into three micro stages (Early, Middle and Later), with the skills that need to be developed in the components becoming progressively more challenging.

Fundamental movement skills should also continue to be developed during this phase. If fundamental motor skills are not developed between the ages of eight to eleven and nine to twelve for females and males respectively, a significant window of opportunity has been lost. This will ultimately compromise the ability of the young player to reach his/her full potential. Technically, strokes are grooved at a higher rhythm. Children should continue to participate in multi-sports and sports that complement tennis. Participants in the early stage of the phase should be encouraged to progress from ITN 10.3 in the Red court to ITN 10.2 in the Orange court. In the later stages participants should progress to the ITN 10.1 Green court and ITN 10 in the full court. The top eight ranked under 12 Irish players will be allocated an ITN 8.
Phase 4:
The Training to Train Phase - ENHANCE.
Age: Males 12-16/Females 11-15 years

The objective of this phase is to consolidate and further develop previously taught skills, and to address the two critical periods of physical development, namely the aerobic base and the strength of the player. It should be noted that both aerobic and strength trainability is dependent on maturation levels, not chronological age. Players who miss this phase of training will not reach their full potential. The participants entering this phase will be allocated an ITN 10 and progress accordingly. The top eight ranked under 14 Irish players will be allocated an ITN 6, and the top eight ranked under 16 Irish players will be allocated an ITN 5.

Phase 5:
The Training to Compete Phase – CULTIVATE.
Age: Males 16-18/Females 15-17 years

The objective of this phase is to consolidate and further develop previously taught skills and to optimise fitness preparation, individual skills and performance. During this phase, high intensity individual and event-specific training is provided to players. Tennis skills are performed under a variety of competitive conditions during training. Special emphasis is placed on optimum preparation by modelling training and competition. The participants entering this phase will be allocated an ITN 10 and progress accordingly. The top eight ranked under 18 Irish players will be allocated an ITN 4.

See the Irish Competitive Player Grid for further information at –
http://www.tennisireland.ie/player_database/guide_for_irish_players

Phase 6:
The Training to Win Phase – PERFORM.
Age: Males 18+/Females 17+ years

This phase of player preparation aims to maximise fitness preparation and individual skills, as well as performance. All of the player’s components are now fully established, and players are trained to peak for major competitions. Training is characterised by high intensity and relatively high volume with frequent periods of rest. The participants
entering this phase will be allocated an ITN 10 and progress accordingly. The top 10 ranked Senior Irish players will be allocated an ITN 2. Players with ATP/WTA Rankings will be allocated an ITN 1.

See the Irish Competitive Player Grid for further information at –
http://www.tennisireland.ie/player_database/guide_for_irish_players

**Phase 7:**
The Active for Life Phase – PROMOTE

This final phase refers to the activities performed after a player has permanently retired from a high level of competition. The aim of this phase is to retain players for the ever growing multi-graded veteran game, coaching, sport administration, officiating, TV or radio presenting, or any other sport-related career. The participants entering this phase will be allocated an ITN appropriate to their current standard of play and can regress or progress accordingly.

See the Irish Competitive Player Grid for further information at -
http://www.tennisireland.ie/player_database/guide_for_irish_players

The ten components of the model have been chosen to guide the development of the player holistically. Each one of these areas is critical to development, and although each one may be more critical at a certain point of development, each contributes to the overall development.

The following is an outline of the ten different components that accompanies the seven stages of PLAYER DEVELOPMENT.

**Player Development Components:**

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Phase 6: The player is trained to peak for major competitions.
Phase 1:  
The Active Start Phase – NURTURE  
Age: 0-5 years

Level of Coach  
Parents and guardians should take the lead in developing physical literacy skills during this Phase.

The Role of the Club  
Club officials and coaches should plan workshops for parents and guardians on the skills they can help their child develop. It will pay dividends later if the Clubs organise physical development classes for children in this age group who are potential future members.

As stated in the Introduction to this document, the main objective of this phase is for children to be introduced to semi-structured active play that incorporates a variety of body movements. Consequently, how we introduce the ten components mentioned above in this phase will also be in a less structured and different way to the subsequent six phases. An early active start enhances development of brain function, physical coordination, gross motor skills, posture and balance. An active start also helps children to build confidence, social skills, emotional control, and imagination whilst reducing stress and improving sleep. And of course, a physically active lifestyle is crucial for life-long health and physical and emotional wellbeing.

This phase is very much dependant on parents and guardians taking on board the importance of introducing children to an Active Start, by learning and understanding about growth and development in young children and becoming involved in the activities they introduce to their children. Children in the Active Start stage should see physical activity as a fun and exciting part of everyday life.
What is meant by physical activity for children in this Phase?

Physical activity means taking part in active play and games that use the large muscles of the body. Whole-body play of almost any kind, especially outdoors play, provides the movement that children need. Play that uses the hands and fingers is important in developing fine-motor skills. Active play is vigorous enough if children breathe faster and deeper, start to sweat and get warm, and can feel their heart beat faster or have redness in their cheeks. Active play is also important for children with a disability, though some activities may have to be modified to ensure children’s safety and to help them have success.

At what age should physical activity start and how much physical activity is required?

Start encouraging physical activity at the infancy stage. Unless they are sleeping, children under six shouldn’t be inactive for more than 60 minutes at a time. As soon as possible, encourage children to roll over and crawl by putting a toy out of their reach. Don’t put it too far away, and let them play with it when they’ve reached it. Remember to provide a safe, stimulating, and interesting environment in which children can physically explore their world.

- **Toddlers (1-3 years):** At least 30 minutes of adult organised activity daily, and from 60 minutes to several hours per day of unstructured physical activity is recommended – especially outdoors.

- **Preschoolers (3-5 years):** At least 60 minutes of structured physical activity every day, and from 60 minutes to several hours of daily unstructured physical activity is recommended – especially outdoors.

Reducing screen time is also important. Children up to two years of age shouldn’t spend any time watching television, and children from ages three to five should be limited to one to two hours of screen time each day.

Types of activities

- **Body control skills** - like balance, moving the arms and legs in rhythmic ways to music, and other exercises to help develop coordination.

- **Motor skills** - like crawling, walking, running, skipping, jumping, leaping and rolling.

- **Sending and receiving skills** - like rolling a ball, throwing, catching, kicking and hitting objects with a bat or stick.
During the toddler and pre-school years, and using the guide above on the length of time per day, have some fun with your child by trying some of the following activities. Use your imagination and come down to the child’s level.

- Crawling
- Climbing (with you behind them for safety).
- Catching and striking balloons with the hand.
- Rolling balls, starting with large light ones and varying the sizes.
- Striking balloons with a table tennis bat.
- Rolling a ball along the ground with a bat.
- Striking a ball along the ground with a bat.
- Kicking a ball with both feet.
- Catching a variety of balls.
- Throwing balls or rubber rings underarm into a container or at a target.
- You throw and they retrieve ball as fast as they can (over very short distances).
- Hopping, skipping, and chasing games.
- Dancing to music.
- Overarm throwing with a table tennis ball advancing to a squash ball.

**Technique on the overarm throwing action is very important for the later Phases.**

Use the following guide for the overarm throwing action. A good technical throwing action is very important to develop the tennis serve, and good work here will pay dividends later.

- Hold the ball with the thumb and the two first fingers.
- Throwing arm bent and elbow starting at shoulder level.
- Turn sideways and point free hand at target.
- Make sure the throw looks like a baseball pitch and not a cricket bowl.
- Progress to a small rubber ball no bigger than a golf ball.
- If you live near a beach, bring the child down to the seashore and make a game out of throwing stones into the water.

Encourage the child to initiate the throw by using the legs.

Children need plenty of praise and encouragement while performing the above activities. Children should learn to be active indoors and outside, and in water. They learn from positive role models.
You know your children will be grown up in the blink of an eyelid. Why not have fun with them while you can, and at the same time contribute to their athletic development and wellbeing? Bring them to the park in good weather, and the Leisureplex in the miserable Irish winter weather, and let them at it!

**COMPETITION**
Participants should be introduced to the early part of Tennis Ireland Skill Awards and progress at their own pace.

**NOTES:**
There are many excellent websites that will provide you with a variety of exercises and activities parents can do with their children at home or outdoors. Here are just a few of the sites that will give you great advice and ideas to encourage a love for sport in your children.

1. **ACTIVE START - Sport New Zealand.** The Crown Entity responsible for sport and recreation in New Zealand. Their vision for New Zealand is: to be the most active nation, to be winning consistently in events that matter to New Zealand, and to achieve this by having the most effective sport and recreation systems.
   
   The video segments on the link below are from the 'Nought to Five” television series that screened in 2006 in New Zealand. The activities are recommended for children in the age groups under five, and show how to get children moving, and consequently learning. http://www.sportnz.org.nz/en-nz/young-people/Ages-0-5-Years/Active-Movement-Resources1/Active-Movement-Videos1/

   The link below has a series of pamphlets that can be downloaded on activities for young children. The “Eyes’ need to move too” is particularly interesting. Covers children in the Active Start Phase:
   
   www.sparc.org.nz
   http://www.sportnz.org.nz/en-nz/Search/?q=Eyes+need+to+move+too

2. **Sport for Life Canada.** Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) is a movement to improve the quality of sport and physical activity in Canada. CS4L links sport, education, recreation and health and aligns community, provincial and national programming:
   
   The Parents Lobbying Kit from the Canadian Sport 4 Life Programme offers parents some really good advice as to what they should be expecting, and the questions they may need to ask, prior to enrolling their child into any type of activity.
   
   Check out the following link for more:
   http://canadiansportforlife.ca/resources/quality-sport-checklist-ask-your-schools-coaches

3. **The Irish Sports Council.** On the Council’s website there are excellent tips to get children active: http://www.getirelandactive.ie/get-active/get-children-active/

4. **Sport Northern Ireland.** To see what’s happening with Sport Northern Ireland’s work on children in sport: http://www.sportni.net/participation/Active+Children
Phase 2: The Fundamental Phase - EXPLORE
Age: Males 6-9/Females 6-8 years

The minimum standard of coach required to work in this phase is a Tennis Ireland Level 1 Coach. A Level 1 Coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 1 Coach Education Programme, and is qualified to work with and develop beginner to intermediate players of all ages and under 9 regional standard players. The Play and Stay Assistant, Tennis Assistant 1 and Tennis Assistant 2 can assist with this phase, but only under the direction and in the presence of a Tennis Ireland qualified coach.

Physical development

Motor Skills - refine basic motor skills such as jumping, hopping, skipping, sidestepping, and running.

- Able to run efficiently, with eyes forward, head level and up, arms dictating speed of legs.
- Able to jump for distance and height, aided by the use of a coordinated arm swing, and land safely.
- Capable of jumping and hopping over small distances in multiple directions (i.e. forward, backwards and to the side) with right and left legs. Player should be well balanced on landing and not require hands or ‘swing leg’ to touch the ground.
- Able to sidestep to the left and right, and also transition into a run.
- Able to make crossover steps (which are important in tennis movement patterns).
- Able to skip rhythmically.
- Able to make the transition from one loco motor pattern (e.g. run) to another (e.g. jump).
Fundamental motor skills: fine-tune single-handed throwing, catching and striking.

- Capable of throwing over arm, with preferred arm, to locations over distances up to 10 metres, and further. Technique should be driven by trunk rotation and not purely by elbow extension.
- Able to throw underarm to a location over distances up to 5 metres with low and high trajectories, using both right and left arms.
- Able to catch with two hands, and with preferred hand, over very short distances.
- Able to strike balls, rolling and bouncing and with no bounce, with implements (supported by both two-handed and one-handed grips), to the right and to the left.

Physical proficiency abilities - improve coordination, body awareness and balance. Enhance movement frequency.

- Able to coordinate hand-eye and foot-eye relationships in the three planes of motion.
- Able to maintain balance on different bases of support (i.e. straight leg, bent leg, and when seated).
- Capable of adjusting posture to assume the most stable position.
- Able to control body in the air (e.g. during/after a jump or hop), ready to change direction after landing.
- Able to perform repetitive upper-body actions (e.g. bouncing balls) and lower-body actions (e.g. foot tapping) at high speed.
- Able to throw, catch or pick up balls while running.
- Able to adjust running speed to intercept, strike or catch.

Flexibility - players are introduced to basic principles of stretching.

- Able to control trunk and limbs in performing upper and lower-body dynamic stretches/mobility exercises.
- Understand that mobility exercises help to prepare the body to play and have fun.
- Able to perform light static stretching as part of a cool-down.
Speed/Agility - from 6 years of age, an opportunity presents to realize significant improvements. There will also be some performance transfer from improved physical proficiency.

- Able to accelerate from a variety of start positions (e.g. standing still, staggered stance, lying down).
- Increasingly able to start and stop quickly and to change direction off either foot.

Strength - bodyweight exercise and supports should develop strength endurance or maximum strength capabilities.

- Able to support bodyweight in climbing and swinging vertically and horizontally.
- Capable of performing sit-ups, cartwheels (supported), handstands and (modified) push-ups.

Endurance - Although not overtly trainable, challenge aerobic metabolism through other sports, characterised by a high level of physical activity.

Multi-sports/activity experience - participation in a variety of sports and physical activity should be encouraged.

- Involved in gymnastics, martial arts and dance (increases coordination, strength, and balance), and/or any code of football, basketball and hockey (increases hand/foot-eye coordination, speed, and endurance), and/or athletics (increase motor and fundamental movement skills)

Footwork - able to or visibly trying to position himself or herself up to and around the ball (i.e. cover the ball), particularly when moving forward.

Ancillary capacities - understand to take fluid regularly, before, during and after practice.

Physical Activity Time (PAT)

6-7 year olds: 30% or 2-4 hours tennis, 70% or 5-7 hours non-tennis per week.
8-9 year olds: 40-50% or 4-5 hours tennis, 50-60% or 5-7 hours non-tennis per week.
## Technical development

**Developing a coordinated link between perception and action**

- Able to judge quickly and respond to different ball trajectories (high, low, short, deep).
- Able to respond to differential ball speeds.

### Assumes sound support/hitting positions

- Able to use square and semi-open stances as appropriate, transferring weight from back to front foot.
- Maintains balanced, neutral shoulder-head alignment.

### Uses acceptable grips

- Forehand: Eastern forehand to Semi-Western.
- One handed backhand: Eastern backhand.
- Two handed backhand: small range of acceptability here. That is, bottom hand (right hand) Semi-Continental and top hand (left hand) Semi-Western/Eastern. Or bottom hand in Eastern backhand, top hand in Eastern forehand.
- Serve and volley: Continental (high forehand and backhand volleys may shift to Eastern forehand and Eastern backhand respectively).

### Acquires basic tennis technique

- Ground strokes: Employs swings that are simple, compact, yet not restricted; with consistent contact points to the side and in front. Emphasise forward and upward movement. Follow through across the body and with the appropriate length. Open stance on forehand is acceptable so long as it’s not too frontal.
- Forehand and backhand volleys characterised by short strokes, with racquet head above the wrist, and a forward punch/block contact.
- Serve: able to use a simple abbreviated over arm service action, and an under arm serve if necessary to Serve, Rally & Score.
- Smash: able to contact ball from a side-on position and in line with the front foot.
- Low ready position at all times on all strokes and with forehand grip.
- Balance: Head still, trunk straight, solid base and low position.
**Tactical development**

Implements basic singles tactics in all five game situations (serve, return, baseline play, approaching the net, and passing the net player).

- Able to hit the ball over the net and into the court (consistency).
- Able to move the opponent (accuracy).
- Able to assume optimal court positions.
- Understands how to attack and defend, ideally knows how to counter-attack.

**Mental development**

**Motivation**

- Intrinsically motivated.
- Visibly working on doing things well.
- Willing to solve problems and seek answers.
- Enjoys activity, has fun (which is the primary reason for participation).

**Concentration**

- Able to create images through game play.

**Control of thoughts**

- Displays positive thinking and self-esteem in supportive environments.
- Experiences and enjoys technical, tactical and/or physical success.

**Other psychological competencies**

- Able to follow basic game rules and scoring.
- Demonstrates positive attitude toward learning.

**Personal Development**

- Able to interact with peers in a variety of different sports settings.
- Able to work with and help other players – capable of cooperation in pairs and in a team.
- Enjoys interacting with and learning from a number of coaches or instructors.
- Able to work, cooperate and play with both boys and girls.
- Displays respect for other players, parents and coaches.
- Understands and is capable of fair play.
- Developing a positive attitude.
Lifestyle

- Involvement in Multi Sports.
- Learn the concepts and practices of safety.

Parental role and support tips

- Initially gets their children interested in sport and allows them to sample a wide range of enjoyable activities, but without focusing on intense training.
- Provide opportunities and access to facilities where children can experience unstructured play (fun activities) and sport play.
- Emphasise the importance of school.
- Reinforce good behaviour and sports-person-like conduct.

Education

Importance of education

- Enjoy school.
- Participate in school extra-curricular activities and school trips where possible.
- Actively involved in unstructured and sport play opportunities at school.

Competition and tournaments

ITN and Skill Awards

Participants should be introduced to the Tennis Ireland Skill Awards and progress through the skills at their own pace. For more information see –
http://www.tennisireland.ie/coaches/skills_awards

Participants having had success at the skill awards can be introduced to the ITN 10.3.

For information on the ITN 10.3 see -
http://www.itftennis.com/shared/medialibrary/pdf/original/IO_8470_original.PDF

Competition/Tournaments plan

- Actively participate and enjoy fun team challenges in the Red and Orange Courts.
- Able to enjoy competition against themselves, and then others, in simple scored games.
- Not yet exposed to organised, structured tennis competition.
- Participation in a variety of ball sport skills competitions.
Phase 3: The Learning to Play and Practice Phase – ENCOURAGE
Age: Males 9-12/Females 8-11 years

It is important to point out that the skills that must be developed within the ten components during this phase should be divided into three stages. This is in order to facilitate the transition through the Orange, Green and full courts with the Orange, Green and Yellow balls. When I mention ‘early to middle stage’ or ‘later stage’, I refer to the transition through the balls and courts. Reference to the ‘early stage’ means the skills that need to be developed in the Orange court with the Orange ball. ‘Middle stage’ refers to the skills that must be developed in the Green court with the Green ball. When I refer to the ‘later stage of the phase’ these are the skills that need to be developed in the full court with the Yellow ball.

Level of Coach - Level 1/Level 2

The minimum standard coach required to work in the early to middle stages of this phase is a Tennis Ireland Level 1 Coach.

A Level 1 coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 1 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop beginner to intermediate players of all ages and under 9 regional standard players.

The minimum standard coach required to work in the later stage of this phase with Regional u12 players is a Level 2 Tennis Ireland Coach.

A Level 2 coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 2 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop intermediate to advanced players of all ages and performance players up to 12 years of age.

The Play and Stay Assistant, Tennis Assistant 1 and Tennis Assistant 2 can assist with stages of this Phase but only under the direction and in the presence of a Tennis Ireland qualified coach.
Physical Development

Motor Skills - continue refinement

Early to middle stage

- Able to move proficiently, and perform the basic motor skills such as jumping, hopping, skipping, side-stepping, and running.
- Able to coordinate upper-body and lower-body during Carioca steps and lunge variations.
- Displays 100% effort most of the time.

Later stage

- Able to move proficiently, and perform the basic motor skills such as jumping, hopping, skipping, side-stepping, and running at higher speeds to the early to middle stage.
- Display improved coordination and fine motor control in all movement patterns (e.g. during ladder work).
- Able to make a transition into and out of all motor patterns (e.g. side-step to run, to side-step).
- Displays 100% effort all of the time.

Fundamental motor skills - marked improvements in precision

Early to middle stage

- Able to throw over arm, with the preferred arm, to locations over longer distances (15 metres and greater).
- Technique should be driven by trunk rotation, and internal rotation of the upper arm (see throwing progressions in the Active Start Phase).
- Able to throw underarm with right and left hands, accurately, with low and high trajectories.
- Able to perform a single-handed catch (right and left hands).
- Able to strike balls – rolling, bouncing and projected - with implements (supported by both two-handed and one-handed grips) to the right and left.
Later stage

- Able to throw over arm, with the preferred arm, to locations over longer distances (greater than the early to middle stage).
- Able to perform a single-handed catch (right and left hands) displaying signs of athleticism in single-handed catches using tennis balls and Frisbees.
- Able to land safely when required to jump or dive.

Physical proficiency abilities

- Coordination including balance, differentiation and rhythm should improve marginally in the early to middle stage of the phase, and progress to excellence in the later stage of the phase.

Enhance movement frequency and movement time

Early to middle stage

- Able to differentiate actions between upper and lower-body and right to left side.
- Displays improving rhythm (or timing) in all striking and movement tasks.
- Able to maintain balance on increasingly challenging bases of support (e.g. on toes, on unstable surfaces).
- Able to perform repetitive upper-body (e.g. bouncing balls) and lower-body (e.g. foot tapping) at higher speeds.
- Able to move in response to a variety of sensory stimuli (i.e. predominantly vision and sound) as quickly as possible.

Later stage

- Able to differentiate actions between upper and lower-body and right to left side at higher-speed actions than the early to middle stage.
- Displays excellent rhythm in all striking and movement tasks.
- Able to control the body in the air and in a controlled manner when performing at higher speeds (i.e. during/after a jump/hop) landing as if ready to change direction.
- Able to skip at high speed, with at least two footwork combinations.
Flexibility

- Able to perform basic static and dynamic stretches in the early to middle stage of the phase. Progressing in the later stage to following more structured static and dynamic stretching and mobility routines, which address all important muscle groups.

Speed/Agility

Early to middle stage

- Continue to develop reaction speed, linear speed and multiple changes of direction.
- Improvements will be largely garnered through developments in running technique and physical proficiency.

Later stage

- Be able to pivot in any direction and accelerate similarly off right and left leg.
- Be visibly improving acceleration over 5 to 10 meters.
- Maintain stable balanced posture when changing direction.
- Realises improvements in agility-test and speed-test fitness test scores.

Strength

Early to middle stage

**Improvements in core control and strength are priorities**

- Continue to develop strength, performing bodyweight exercises and supports to develop strength endurance capabilities.

Later stage

- Able to perform a variety of modified but preferably full bodyweight exercises with correct form.
- Able to perform and stabilise self in increasingly challenging (i.e. complex) exercises and postures.
- Demonstrates sound core control and strength (sensitive to development).
Power –

Early to middle stage

- Able to perform sidearm and over arm throws of an appropriately weighted and appropriately sized medicine ball.
- Able to jump, hop and throw repetitively, with control.

Later stage

- Display increasingly short catch-release time in sidearm medicine ball throws and able to coordinate trunk and lower and upper-bodies when throwing for distance.
- Prioritises and visibly improves horizontal jumps (single and consecutive standing) for distance.

Endurance

- In the early to middle stage of the phase, be able to compete in other sports characterized by a high level of physical activity for up to 30 minutes, without getting overtly fatigued. Progressing in the later stage to competing in sports of extended duration (e.g. 40 minutes) and three set tennis matches without fatigue visibly impairing performance.

Multi-sports/activity experience

- In the early to middle stages of the phase, participation in a variety of sports and physical activities should be encouraged.
- In the later stage of the phase participate in sports that may transfer more directly to improved on-court performance.
- Participate in the various football codes, basketball and hockey (increase hand/foot-eye coordination, speed, and endurance), athletics (increase motor and fundamental movement skills), and/or cycling (increase lower body power, endurance).
Footwork

Early to middle stage

- Better able to position up to and around the ball (i.e. cover the ball), particularly when moving forward.
- Increasingly able to synchronise footwork (e.g. split step) to incoming ball, both from the baseline and on return of serve.
- Able to maintain or regain own position on baseline after executing serves, returns and ground-strokes from different court positions.
- Able to move to use best shot on the second serve return and during rallies.

Later stage

- Able to cover balls in all court locations.

Fitness testing / Screening

- Performs a battery of tennis-specific field tests at least twice annually.
- From twelve years of age, participates in physiotherapy screening annually.

Physical Activity Time (PAT)

9-10 years old: 50-60% or 7-9 hours tennis, and 40-50% or 5-7 hours non-tennis per week.
10 to 12 years old: 60-65% or 10-12 hours tennis, and 30-35% or 6-8 hours non-tennis per week.

Technical development

Early to middle stage

Core Characteristics

- Develop a coordinated link between perception and action advancing towards refining the link.
- Able to judge quickly and respond to different ball trajectories (high, low, short, deep) from all areas of the court. Use cue words.
- Able to adjust and respond to different ball speeds and spins.
- Grooving the strokes at a higher rhythm.
- Introduce the basis of special strokes.
- Sharpening control with an emphasis on placement and optimal zone of impact.
- Attempts to take balls on the rise as often as possible.
- Able to volley consistently in short volley exchanges.
- Athletic position.
- Feet always moving.
- Good split step.
- Back leg behind the ball and pushes forward.
Assumes sound support/hitting positions

- Able to use open and semi-open stances, and adjusts stance according to tactical intention and grip.
- Able to hit off different supports (i.e. particularly back leg and two legs) but still largely endeavour to transfer weight forward. Advancing to hitting off all supports (i.e. two feet, back foot, front foot, outside foot, inside foot) using foot interaction with the ground favourably.
- Integrates greater horizontal leg drive (transfer of weight forward) in groundstroke production. Advancing to aggressive horizontal leg drive, with increasingly vertical component in ground stroke and serve production.
- Maintains balanced, neutral shoulder-head alignment.

Swing and ball control

- Able to coordinate racquet trajectories to apply observable slice and topspin to ground strokes, and slice to serves.
- Demonstrates ‘feel’ in ground strokes, volleys and overhead in mini-tennis settings.
- Improving racquet-ball handling through control of basic half volley and drop shot swing patterns.

Uses acceptable grips

- Forehand: Eastern forehand to Semi-Western.
- One handed backhand: Eastern backhand.
- Two handed backhand: small range of acceptability here. That is, bottom hand (right hand) Semi-Continental and top hand (left hand) Semi Western/Eastern. Or bottom hand in Eastern backhand, top hand in Eastern forehand.
- Serve and volley: Continental (high forehand and backhand volleys may shift to Eastern forehand and Eastern backhand respectively).
Acquire stroke fundamentals such that foundation for quality stroke production is laid.

Serve

- Well-placed toss.
- Emphasise good balance.
- Palm of hand faces down throughout preparation.
- Left arm goes first – should be releasing ball when right hand is still low.
- Most of the time starting and finishing on the left foot.
- Able to serve wide, to T, and to body on both sides (i.e. advantage and deuce), with an action that is rhythmical and coordinated. Possesses a high contact point, and a follow through across the body.
- Use of a small knee bend can be incorporated after the basic action has been learned, and pushing up from the back leg.
- Able to impart some slice and lift with the second serve.

Ready Position

- Special attention should be given to the ready position.

Ground Strokes

Forehand

- Able to hit forehands characterized by a smooth action with shoulder turn, racquet positioned at a comfortable distance from the body, with correct footwork at all times.
- Use of a semi open stance is preferred.
- Forward and upward emphasis (as a source of power).
- Swings should be simple, from low to high, with a consistent contact point to the side and in front, and a longer follow through dependent on ball hit.
- Ball should be taken on the rise as much as possible.
- Extra ground reaction force and extra rotation required.
One handed backhand

- Able to hit one-handed backhand using a shoulder turn, in order to activate a long rhythmical stroke with a take-back where both arms work together.
- A square stance should feature, and the player should rotate forward to contact in line with, but to the side of, the front foot.
- The follow through should be above shoulder height and toward the centre of the court.
- Good balance.

Two handed backhand

- Executes two-handed backhands using a compact action, usually with a straight or looped take-back.
- Evident trunk rotation, arms close to the body, more prominent use of the top hand, and the front foot angled down the court.
- Player loads on back foot, transferring weight to the front foot through contact.
- Better possibilities to play on the rise.
- Higher impact.
- Good balance.

Return

- When returning serve, able to direct the ball down the line and crosscourt, with forehand and backhand, on both sides.
- Assume good court position (i.e. near the baseline) and complete the necessary positioning skills.

Volley

- Able to volley with a short stroke, racquet head above the wrist, sufficient trunk rotation and footwork, bodyweight moving towards the ball.
- A forward punch/block contact with the racquet head moving from high to low.
- Reliance on hitting backhand volleys with two hands should be reduced.
- Able to execute basic shape and consistent contact points in backhand slice and drive volley.
Smash

- Able to move to contact the ball in a side-on position, and in line with the front foot.
- Consistently able to direct the ball into the court.

Passing

- Able to pass with a drive or lob.

Later stage

Core Characteristics

- Refine and further develop the characteristics from the early to middle stage. Refine a coordinated link between perception and action.

Swing and ball control

Stroke technique should allow for future development of power, possess no major weakness and present two potential (stroke or movement) weapons.

- Able to generate sufficient racquet head speed and trajectory to create crosscourt angle from on, behind, and in front of the baseline.
- Able to adjust racquet trajectories to hit with varying amounts of topspin/slice and capable of flattening out a stroke.
- Able to hit through as well as around (i.e. angled groundstroke) and across the ball (e.g. high one-handed backhand).
- Displays improving control of half volley and drop shots.
- Able to direct them to variable court widths.

Ensure the further acquisition of stroke fundamentals, such that foundation for quality stroke production is progressed.

Serve

- Able to serve with increasing spin, especially on the second serve.
- Displays increased rotation of hip and shoulders, amplified knee bend and leg drive to help rotation and coordination.
- Lands on the front foot.
- Able to place serve to T, body, and wide in both courts.
Returning Serve

- Assumes a good court position for returning first and second serves, and performs necessary footwork to optimise impact position.
- Able to return deep and short angled from either side.
- Able to efficiently adjust to body serves, and employ a compact swing pattern for faster serves.

Ground Strokes

- Able to hit forehands, maintaining a smooth but increasingly dynamic stroke.
- Able to employ a variety of stances, and coordinate increased lower body drive and trunk rotation.
- Uses a compact looped backswing, transitioning to a low to high forward swing, with the contact point increasingly specific to the grip but still in front and to the side.
- Longer follow through, with actual finish point determined by the type of shot.
- Able to move around the backhand and effectively use topspin.
- One handed backhand: employs a take-back with both arms working together. Shoulder rotation should precede backward movement of the racquet, with an observable separation angle at the end of the backswing. Forward rotation should be characterised by trunk rotation and an unwinding of the arm (through abduction and extension). This provides a contact point in front and aligned to the side of the front foot. The follow through should be over shoulder height and out in front.
- Two handed backhand: able to use a take-back appropriate to the situation, and drive racquet speed with observable trunk/shoulder rotation. Front foot should be angled down the court.

Volley

- Able to volley with a short stroke, the racquet head above the wrist and with observable trunk rotation.
- Coordinated footwork with bodyweight moving towards the ball, and a forward punch/block contact.
- Able to play one-handed backhand volleys.
Backhand Slice

- Able to play a backhand slice, controlling the racquet head at impact and using the non-racquet arm to help maintain a consistent swing-path.

Smash

- Able to coordinate footwork to move forward, backward and to the side to contact ball overhead and out in front. Able to perform basic jump from back leg to front leg (i.e. scissor action) when moving backwards.

Lob

- Able to play both offensive and defensive lobs.

Other

- Increasingly proficient at passing with a drive or lob.
- Demonstrates improved precision and consistency in drive volleys and drop shots.
- Able to execute the basic shape of a backhand smash.

Tactical Development

Early to middle stage

Core characteristics - maintain and develop the tactics already learned in the Red Court and further develop the tactics in the five game situations in the Orange Court and Green Court.

- Proficient at hitting the ball over and in the court (consistency).
- Able to move player (accuracy) using both width and length of the court.
- Tries to maintain and reassume a ready position just behind or in front of the baseline.
- Able to execute simple attack, defend and counter-attack.
- Able to construct points by understanding cause and effect relationships.
- Understands what is likely to happen when balls are hit to certain parts of the court.
- Understands how to take the ball early, and the pressure this imposes on an opponent.
- Understands the need to play specific sequences of shots to achieve desired outcomes.
In doubles, understands different players’ roles, and the concept of team play. Ability to play in the five game situations.

Serve

- Able to direct the ball to locations that trouble or makes opponent move.
- Use aggressive play after the serve.
- Start to use topspin on second serve.

Return of serve

- Able to return to challenge opponents’ movement or court position.
- Proficient in creating deep or short angles from wide serves.
- Begin to use forehand to take control of weak second serves.

Baseline play

- Capable of keeping ball in play but also deep in the opponents court during baseline exchanges.
- When rallying, can move the opponent along the baseline by hitting accurately.
- Identifies and successfully executes opportunities to hit higher and deeper balls to maintain good court position, and also to put opponent under pressure.
- Grooving good diagonals and when to come out of them.
- Ability to vary the rhythm.
- Starting to analyse opponents play on different surfaces.

Approach the net

- Able to hit earlier balls and move forward.
- Use slice to approach off backhand
- Use forehand drive approach.
- Good positioning around the net.

Passing

- Chooses to pass with a drive or two-time pass, but more frequently using the lob (due to lack of power and spin).
Later stage

Core Characteristics - maintain and develop the tactics already learned on the Orange court and the Green court. Make the transition to the full court and further develop singles tactics in the five game situations.

- Able to attack, defend, and counter-attack in and from a variety of game situations.
- Able to construct points by understanding what he/she does well, and use those strengths accordingly. Able to move in such a way as to maximise opportunities to use weapons.
- Able to construct points by understanding that opponent has weaknesses. Be able to exploit them.
- Able to construct points by understanding the continued need to play specific sequences of shots, and potentially adapt these sequences to achieve desired outcomes.
- Able to construct points by understanding the benefits of playing the ball early, rather than just trying to hit hard.

Develops tennis intelligence

- Able to distinguish between strategy and tactics.
- Knows how to pressure by position.
- Adapts to play on different surfaces.
- Able to map out and execute a specific game plan.
- Able to perform basic match analysis.
- Can play in the five game situations.

Serve

- Able to create an increasing number of problems for the opponent with the serve.
- Able to direct the serve to position, with a view to playing a specific second shot.
- Able to perform a basic serve and volley movement pattern.

Return of serve

- Able to anticipate returns based on cues such as ball toss.
- Proficient in opening the court off wide and T serves.
- Chooses to vary the pace/spin of the return.
- Able to plan and implement different two-shot combinations (e.g. big X).
- Uses best groundstroke (i.e. weapon) to take control of the point on second serves.
Baseline play

- Able to open the court when hitting crosscourt, and accelerate down the line.
- Able to make appropriate decision (based on perception and/or anticipation) regarding when to change direction in a crosscourt exchange.
- Able to maintain attacking position on the baseline, but can adjust court position based on opponents’ displacement.
- Selects appropriate time to vary rally tempo.

Approach the net

- Understands when to vary approach shots with slice and/or drive (i.e. with respect to ball height/speed, opponents position etc).
- Tries to play balls increasingly early, attacking mid and 3/4 court balls, including those at shoulder height.
- Understands that the first volley does not necessarily have to be a winner.

Passing

- Makes better decisions regarding the use of drives or lobs based on own as well as opponent’s court position.
- Uses two time pass as an option.

Doubles

- Able to move quickly to the net, and into the appropriate position after a weak serve.
- Chooses to vary the return (e.g. short crosscourt, lob).
- Able to decide and implement poaching when both teams are playing one-up one-back.

Mental Development

Motivation

Early to middle stage

- Intrinsically motivated.
- Visibly working on doing things well.
- Willing to solve problems and seek answers.
- Enjoys learning and playing, has fun (which drives participation).
- Displays 100% effort most of the time,
- Shows the desire to impose strengths on an opponent.
- Able to set simple goals.

**Later stage**

- Introduction to the logbook.
- Able to set measurable performance-related goals with a time frame (i.e. short-term, intermediate and long-term).
- Displays 100% effort all of the time. Encompasses the determination to fight and successfully execute each shot or intention.

**Concentration**

**Early to middle stage**

- Adjusts attention to a variety of stimuli.
- Creates more specific images through game play.

**Later stage**

- Able to focus when confronted with potential distractions.
- Starting to use rituals and routines between points and games.

**Control of thoughts**

**Early to middle stage**

- Displays positive thinking and self-esteem in supportive environments.
- Experiences and enjoys technical, tactical and/or physical success.
- Tries to implement what has been practiced in game-play.

**Later stage**

- Uses self-talk to facilitate skill acquisition/refinement, and concentration.
- Maintains positive body language on-court.
Emotional Control

Early to middle stage

- Able to relax through games and activities.
- Able to enjoy activity, regardless of outcome.

Later stage

- Learns to deal with tension and environmental influences on performance during match play.
- Beginning to use strategies such as breath control when on-court.
- Able to manage mistakes on-court through effective mistake management routines.

Other psychological qualities

Early to middle stage

- Shows discipline through further understanding of outcomes of different behaviors.
- Follows basic game rules and scoring.
- Demonstrates positive attitude toward learning.

Later stage

- Possesses self-discipline.
- Well-behaved in match play and practice.
- Displays sizeable specific sports and tennis knowledge.
- Able to distinguish between effort and ability.
- Understand the relationship between effort and outcome.
- Displays greater understanding of what is required in committing to tennis.
- Developing independence through self-preparation for matches (e.g. own warm-up and stretching).
- Coachable.

Personal

Early to middle stage

- Accept discipline and structure.
- Understands the relationship between effort and outcome.
- Able to interact with peers in a variety of different sports settings.
- Able to cooperate in pairs and teams.
Able to and enjoys interacting with/learning from a number of coaches or instructors.
Able to work, cooperate and play with both boys and girls.
Displays respect for officials, other players, parents and coaches.
Understands the concepts of and is and capable of fair play.
Able to identify role model sportspersons.

Later stage

Understands the changes puberty will bring.
Able to interact with male and female peers and adults in a variety of different sports settings, including at tournaments.
Proficient at working in pairs and as a team to achieve common goals.
Able to participate in a large number of social events outside tennis.
Able to display tenderness, admiration and appreciation.
Understands the influence of the peer group on values and attitudes.
Respects family values.
Able to identify role models who are tennis players.
Progressively copes with the changes that accompany puberty.

Lifestyle

Involvement in Multi Sports.
Inclusion of sport in lifestyle.
Participate in complementary sports.
Understands the importance of sleep, nutrition and hydration.

Parental role and support tips

Early to middle stage

Provide opportunities and access to facilities where children can experience unstructured play (fun activities) and sport play.
Emphasise the importance of school.
Place winning and losing in a healthy perspective.
Continue to encourage children to participate in a variety of sports and other physical activities.
Reinforce good behaviour and sportsperson-like conduct.
Later stage
- Provide opportunities and access to facilities where children can participate in a variety of sports.
- Emphasise school and sport achievement.
- Keep winning and losing in a healthy perspective.
- Positive yet realistic in their belief in their child’s talents.
- Support any decision to continue to be involved in selected sports, but do not pressurise children into specialising in tennis.
- Reinforce good behaviour and sportsperson-like conduct.

Education
Early to middle stage
- Understands that school is a priority throughout their childhood and adolescent lives.
- Participates in extracurricular school activities and trips where possible.
- Actively involved in sport play at school.
- Participates in inter-school sports.
-Displays sizeable specific sports knowledge.

Later stage
- Able to identify role model sportspersons who have achieved academic and sporting success.
- May develop an interest in a second language.
- Receptive to teachers and coaches who create positive environments in which skills can be developed.

Competition/Tournaments
ITN
Participants in the early to middle stages should be encouraged to progress from ITN 10.3 in the Red Court to ITN 10.2 in the Orange Court.

In the later stage, participants should progress to the ITN 10.1 Green Court and ITN 10 and ITN 9 in the full court.

The top 8 ranked under 12 players in Ireland will be allocated an ITN 8.

For information on ITN 10.1 and 10.2 see the following link - http://www.itftennis.com/shared/medialibrary/pdf/original/IO_8470_original.PDF
Competition/Tournaments guidelines

Early to middle stage

- Actively participates and enjoys team/fun challenges and round robin tournaments.
- Able to compete against boys and girls in most activities, and particularly in doubles.
- Presented with the opportunity to participate in, on average, two hours of competition per week.
- Compete in 10-15 tournaments annually; playing three ‘matches’ per tournament such that players experience both positive and negative outcomes.
- Per year, children should play around 20 singles and 30 doubles matches.
- No age group ranking lists or national championships exist from 9-11 years.

Later stage

- Actively participate in ‘feed-in’ and some ‘knock-out’ tournaments.
- Age-group competitions will become increasingly gender-specific.
- Presented with the opportunity to participate in, on average, no less than three hours of competition per week.
- The top ranked players should compete in 12 to 18 tournaments (comprising 2-3 National; 5-7 Provincial; 2-3 International; 2-3 Team/Club) annually.
- Per year, children should play 40-50 singles and 20-30 doubles matches.
- Players should only play up when they have the very real prospect of experiencing victory.
- Understand Tennis Ireland’s Passport System.
Phase 4: The Training to Train Phase – ENHANCE

Age: Males 12-16/Females 11-15 years

The minimum standard coach required to work in this phase can vary depending on whether the players involved are recreational, club or performance players.

A Level 1 Coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 1 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop beginner to intermediate players of all ages and under 9 regional standard players.

A Level 2 Coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 2 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop intermediate to advanced players of all ages and performance players up to 12 years of age.

A Level 3 Coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 3 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop players at all levels.

The Play and Stay Assistant, Tennis Assistant 1 and Tennis Assistant 2 can assist with part of this phase, but only under the direction and in the presence of a Tennis Ireland qualified coach.

Physical development

Prior to peak height velocity (PHV), trainability heightens. PHV refers to the maximum rate of growth in stature during the growth spurt. The age of maximum velocity of growth is called the age at PHV.1

The period of rapid growth rate during adolescence is usually expressed as the age of peak height velocity (peak body mass velocity usually occurs some months later).

Most girls have their adolescent growth spurt between the age of 12 and 13 years; the growth spurt of most boys occurs between the age of 14 and 15 years.
During the growth spurt, young people are particularly prone to sports injuries, because of a discrepancy between bone matrix formation and bone mineralization which diminishes bone strength. In addition, the growth plates in bones are extremely vulnerable to external forces.

Repetitive, moderate to high-intensity activities (e.g. distance running and sports with throwing actions such as tennis) can easily overload the musculoskeletal system causing injuries. Examples include Osgood-Schlatter disease and ‘little leaguer’s elbow’.

Motor & fundamental movement skills

You may need to revisit some of the earlier skills during potential periods of ‘adolescent awkwardness’.

Physical proficiency abilities

- Maintains balance on challenging bases of support (i.e. on unstable surfaces) and on all court surfaces.
- Displays excellent rhythm.
- Able to control the body in the air and in a controlled manner at higher speeds (e.g. during/after a jump/hop), landing as if ready to change direction.

Flexibility

- Follows increasingly individualised static and dynamic stretching routines that address all important muscle groups.
- Able to implement active and passive static stretching techniques and PNF stretching as growth begins to slow (i.e. post peak height velocity).
- Able to perform self-administered stretching sessions.

Speed/Agility

- Regularly integrated as part of warm-ups.
- Able to move efficiently at high speeds in a linear, lateral and multi-directional fashion (i.e. agility).
- Maintains stable balanced posture when changing direction at higher speeds, off right and left foot.
Strength

Strength training should intensify at or slightly after PHV. Crucially, injury prevention addresses any imbalances or deficits in motor control.

- Able to perform single-joint and a variety of multi-joint exercises with appropriate resistances and correct form.
- Capable of safely performing appropriate (closed/open-chain) exercises using both machine and free weights. Able to perform exercises correctly with Thera-Band and Swiss ball.
- Able to follow an individualised resistance-training programme and work toward related goals.
- Demonstrates sound core (i.e. abdominal and lower back muscle) strength and shoulder/scapula control.
- Possesses or working to develop acceptable bilateral and antagonist/agonist strength ratios.

Power

The integration of base muscle endurance and control as a precursor to periodized individualised strength training and injury prevention and improvements in core control and strength are a priority.

- Visibly improving vertical jumps and hops.
- Proficient at horizontal jumping and hopping progressions.
- Generates higher velocities and covers larger distances in sidearm and over arm medicine ball throws.

Endurance

Coinciding with or after PHV, concerted endurance training is performed.

- Able to complete both specific on-court and off-court endurance training sessions aimed at elevating VO2 max.

Multi-sports experience/cross training

- Adds a variety to training while also having specific physical transfer to performance.
- May be prescribed to facilitate recovery.
Footwork

- Able to cover all balls.
- Moves effectively to execute and recover from inside-out shots.
- Visibly improving movement and positioning through approach and to volley.

Fitness testing/screening

- Perform a battery of tennis-specific field and laboratory tests at least twice annually.
- Participates in a physiotherapy screening annually.

Ancillary capacities

- Individually responsible for warm-ups and cool-downs.
- Able to follow individualised programming and periodisation for all physical abilities.
- Meets specific athlete dietary requirements, and follows individualised pre-, during and post match nutrition and hydration strategies.
- With the help of the coach, able to develop strategies to recover mentally and physically from intense training and competition.
- Monitors and is aware of significance of Peak Height Velocity, and the opportunities or windows of trainability that present.
- Keeps daily training and well-being diaries.

General movement training

Three hours per week, specific conditioning 1 hour on-court, 2 hours off-court.

Physical Activity Time (PAT)

12-13 year olds: 60-70% or 12-14 hours tennis, and 30-40% or 6-8 hours non-tennis per week.

14-15 year olds: 65-75% or 16-20 hours tennis, and 25-35% or 6-8 hours non-tennis per week.
Technical development

Core Characteristics

Cement a coordinated link between perception and action.

- Better able to perceive and use cues related to player’s court position and racquet preparation/swing, and beginning to process those related to body alignment.
- Responds earlier to different ball speeds and spins.
- Takes a larger number of balls on the rise, off both sides and on return of serve.
- Able to play behind moving opponent.

Assumes sound support/hitting positions

- Adjusts stance according to tactical intention.
- Able to hit with increasing velocity off all supports (i.e. two feet, back foot, front foot, outside foot, inside foot).
- Visible increase in involvement of the lower body in stroke production, especially vertically.
- Maintains balanced, neutral shoulder-head alignment.

Swing and ball control

- Able to generate appropriate racquet head speed and trajectory to create cross-court and inside-out angle from on, behind, and in front of the baseline.
- Able to adjust racquet trajectories to hit with varying amounts of topspin/slice and capable of flattening out a stroke at higher speeds.
- Able to hit through as well as around the ball with increasing topspin and speed (e.g. angled groundstroke) and across the ball (e.g. high backhand, inside-out forehand).
- Displays improving control of half volley and drop shots and able to direct these shots to variable court locations.
- Able to hold court position and stance so as to experiment with swing paths to hit groundstroke half-volleys.

Acceptable grips

Grips should be well ingrained but here is a reminder.

**Forehand:** Semi-Western to Western.

**One handed backhand:** Eastern backhand.

**Two handed backhand:** Bottom hand in Continental to Eastern backhand, top hand in Eastern forehand to Semi-Western forehand.

**Serve and volleys:** Continental. (High forehand and backhand volleys may shift to Eastern forehand and Eastern backhand respectively.)
Stroke technique provides for enhanced power development, and sound defence.

- Able to generate high racquet and ball speeds from balls with little pace.
- Possesses at least one weapon to dominate the point.

Serve

- Able to increase use of legs and trunk rotation. Displays fully developed coordination chain.
- Able to hit serves with increased slice and topspin.
- Capable of readying self quickly after the serve.

Return of Serve

- Displays visibly improving placement and preparation for the next shot.
- Able to use more open-stance returns.

Forehand

- Able to generate or employ greater ground reaction forces and additional shoulder and hip rotation.
- Capable of loading on outside or back leg to drive forward/upward into the stroke.
- Exhibits balance and control in leaving the ground.
- Adjusts preparation to the situation with a variety of footwork options. Robust technique allows for consistent contact points when hitting balls on the rise.

Two-handed backhand

- Able to use a shorter, higher preparation depending on the grip.
- Employs preparation and stance appropriate to the situation.
- Displays consistent stroke pattern and loads increasingly on the back or outside leg to drive forward and upward.

One-handed backhand

- Better use of hip and shoulder rotation.
- Higher (amplified) backswing with improved leverage during the forward swing.
- Preparation appropriate to situation.
- Able to play backhand slices at different speeds.
Volley

- Able to volley for depth and angle.
- Able to cope with balls of different height and thus execute different racquet trajectories.
- Able to lower centre of gravity through active knee bend.
- Ensures contact point is out in front and to the side, with the weight transferring forward.
- Exhibits good use of non-racquet arm to support a compact swing.
- Uses one-handed backhand volley.
- Able to play drive volleys precisely (i.e. to different court widths).

Smash

- Able to smash to position.
- Able to coordinate footwork to move forward, backward and to the side, to contact ball overhead and out in front.
- Able to perform a smash moving backward.
- Able to execute a backhand smash.

Approach shots

- Able to drive and slice approach shots from varying court locations.

Passing

- Able to play topspin forehand and backhand lobs on the run.

Tactical development

Core Characteristics

- Implements advanced singles tactics in all five game situations.
- Able to anticipate opponent’s shot tendencies based on court position (particularly during baseline play).

Develop own game-style

- Able to better use own strengths.
- Plays specific sequences of shots to achieve desired outcomes.
- Visibly tries to implement own game-style irrespective of court surface.
- Able to attack, counter-attack and defend against various styles of play.
Displays improved decision-making

- Able to adapt during match play to formulate alternate methods, and exploit weaknesses of an opponent.
- Plays percentages: chooses to use certain sequences of shots that provide the best chance to win the point.
- Chooses appropriate times to vary rhythm or lift tempo.
- Decides to play behind opponent at the correct time.

Exhibits developing tennis intelligence

- Able to actively analyse opponent during match play.
- Able to map out and execute a specific game plan.
- While developing a game style, recognises the need to sometimes come up with a ‘plan B’.
- Performs insightful match analysis.
- Able to adapt to different weather conditions.
- Able to discount opponent’s shot options based on certain technical limitations.
- Able to interpret basic match statistics.
- Begins to use video-based simulation training to facilitate decision-making.
- Understands court geometry.
- Understands value and need for sustained and deliberate practice of all skills.

Plays in the five game situations

Serve

- Able to use the serve to maximise chances of immediately using own weapon.
- Uses serve and volley as a viable tactical option.
- Able to implement specific serve and second shot combinations when serves are directed wide, to the T or at the body.
- Beginning to disguise serve placement.
Return of serve

- Able to anticipate returns based on ball toss and some body cues.
- Plans and implements different two-shot combinations. Uses best groundstroke (i.e. weapon) to take control of the point on second serves.
- Capitalises on opportunities to attack first and second serves.
- Varies the pace/spin of the return in an appropriate fashion.

Baseline play

- Able to open the court when hitting crosscourt, and inside-out, and correctly decides when to change rally/shot direction.
- Able to disguise drop shots.

Approach the net

- Correctly decides when to vary approach shots with slice and/or drive.
- Able to hit mid-court and 3/4 court balls to different locations, and move to the net to finish the point (i.e. uses specific two-shot combinations).
- Selectively and correctly decides to hit first volley to position rather than to win the point and able to set up and win points with two volleys.
- Better able to surprise opponent through the improved ability to synchronise and disguise ‘sneak in’ (e.g. after a good serve, groundstroke or drop shot that has opponent on the stretch).

Passing

- Makes better decisions regarding the use of drives or lobs.
- Able to disguise intent on passing shots (particularly lob).
- Able to implement two-ball pass combinations.

Doubles

- Able to serve and volley to a plan.
- Able to plan and adjust return and second shot combinations.
- Able to decide and implement poach when both teams are playing one up-one back.
- Able to make appropriate decisions when playing against different combinations of opponents at the net.
- Understands and exploits advantages of serving with a high first serve percentage, and playing down the middle.
Mental development

Motivation

- Intrinsically motivated.
- Shows pride in performance.
- Willing to solve problems and seek answers.
- Enjoys learning and playing.
- Displays 100% effort, and desire to impose strengths on an opponent regardless of match score.
- Sets performance goals (short, medium and long-term), centred on developing physical, technical, psychological or tactical skills. Also able to set and work to specific and measurable long-term outcome goals.

Concentration

- Uses specific concentration strategies in practice and in match play.
- Uses rituals and routines between points and games.
- Able to maintain or shift concentration when confronted with distractions (e.g. disputes with umpires, noisy crowd or practice environment, poorly-behaved opponents).

Control of thoughts

- Displays positive thinking and self-esteem in supportive environments.
- Experiences and enjoys technical, tactical, physical or psychological success.
- Willing to try what has been practiced in game-play, with a view to achieving performance goals.
- Uses visualisation to facilitate technical refinement, also ‘mental toughness’ and tactical skill.
- Maintains positive body language on-court. Uses power walk.
- Able to use cognitive reframing techniques (i.e. changing negative self-talk, to positive self-talk).
- Displays positive approach in sustaining a lead and works to overcome any fear of failure.
Emotional Control

- Better able to deal with tension and environmental influences on performance during match play.
- Able to control breathing patterns.
- Accepts mistakes are part of learning, consequently able to manage mistakes on-court through effective mistake management routines.
- Understands how arousal is linked to performance, and able to use strategies to approximate optimal performance state.
- Follows on-court and off-court performance routines, using relaxation and visualization techniques before, during and after practice and matches.
- Able to deal with the pressures associated with national and international competition.
- Able to prepare for different environments (e.g. heat, cold, altitude, rain, etc).

Other psychological competencies

- Self-disciplined and well-behaved in match play and practice.
- Able to review performance effectively.
- Demonstrates positive attitude towards learning and is generally optimistic.
- May show adaptive perfectionist tendencies, but able to accept results and move on.
- Possesses insightful analytic abilities, understands game-styles, match plans and able to independently detect and correct performance mistakes.
- Capable of maintaining intensity when training without supervision.
- Displays greater commitment to tennis.
- Developing independence through self-preparation for matches (e.g. own warm-up and stretching) and arrangement of own practices.
- Coachable.
- Competitive.
- Respects and does not underestimate opponent’s ability.

Personal

- Able to separate own self-worth from results in competition or ranking position.
- Male players should recognise that female athletes may face a problem of femininity versus sport development.
- Female players should recognise that male athletes may face problems relating performance to masculinity.
Displays respect for officials, coaches and other players and aware of posture and need to make eye-contact with tournament officials and assistants.

Enjoys and participates in other sports, social and academic activities outside of tennis when time allows.

Able to give a post-match speech, thanking people and speaking positively about opponent.

Shows sportsperson-like conduct.

Displays sound interpersonal skills and appreciative of the resources required to achieve optimal performance.

Feels team spirit and a sense of responsibility and ‘belonging’ in team competitions and in doubles play.

Beginning to display leadership skills.

Respects cultural diversity.

Progressively copes with the changes that accompany puberty.

Lifestyle

Is fully aware of the importance of sleep, nutrition and hydration.

Keeps a training and performance log to assist with setting performance goals (short, medium and long-term) and to keep a record of the training programme.

Able to effectively manage time.

Introduction to planning and periodisation.

Well laid out training, competition and recovery programme to optimise the various training effects.

Parental role and support tips

Support children’s decision to specialise in tennis.

Show great interest in child’s sport.

Keep winning and losing in a healthy perspective.

Positive, yet realistic, in their belief of their child’s talents.

Content to have their children focus solely on school and sport achievement, alleviating any pressure on players to find part-time work.

Assisting the child in fighting any setbacks that might hinder training progression.

Make a financial and a time commitment to their child.

Aware of different modes of scholastic fulfilment (e.g. distance education).

Help guide child in their potential involvement with player agents.

Evaluate what is best for child’s tennis and education and reaches an agreement with coach/teachers as to merits of distance education versus continued schooling, versus relocation.

Reinforces appreciation of different cultures.
Education

- Understands that education is a priority.
- Participate in school trips where possible.
- Participate in school sports and inter-school sports where possible.
- Learns more about sportspersons who have achieved both academic and sporting success.
- May pursue an interest in a second language (this may help enhance international junior tournament experience).
- From teachers - learn academic work ethic, ability to relax effectively, and separation of their sense of identity from tennis.

Competition/Tournaments

ITN
The participants entering this stage will be allocated an ITN 10 and progress accordingly. The top 8 ranked under 14 players will be allocated an ITN 6 and the top 8 ranked under 16 players will be allocated an ITN 5.

Competition/Tournaments plan

- Periodisation should be planned, featuring three peak performances per year.
- Presented with the opportunity to participate, on average, in four hours of competition per week.
- Compete in 20-25 tournaments annually (comprising 4-5 national; 2-3 provincial; 4-6 international; 2-3 team).
- Children should play 60-70 singles and 30-40 doubles matches annually.
- ‘33% rule’ should apply - 33% of matches against weaker, comparable, and stronger opponents respectively.
Phase 5: The Training to Compete Phase – CULTIVATE
Age: Males 16-18/Females 15-17 years

The minimum standard of coach required to work in this phase varies, depending on whether the players involved are recreational, club or performance players.

A Level 1 Coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 1 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop beginner to intermediate players of all ages, and under 9 regional standard players.

A Level 2 Coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 2 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop intermediate to advanced players of all ages and performance players up to 12 years of age.

A Level 3 Coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 3 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop players at all levels.

The Play and Stay Assistant, Tennis Assistant 1 and Tennis Assistant 2 can assist with part of this phase but only under the direction and in the presence of a Tennis Ireland qualified coach.

Physical development

Motor skills
- Able to perform acquired motor skills at higher speeds, whilst maintaining correct form.

Fundamental movement skills
- Visibly improving throw, jump and hop for distance and speed.
- Able to maintain correct throwing, catching, jumping, and hopping under/with additional load.
Physical proficiency abilities

- Maintains balance on challenging bases of support (i.e. on unstable surfaces) and on all court surfaces.
- Able to maintain balance on unstable surfaces with external load.
- Displays excellent rhythm (or timing) in all striking and movement tasks.
- Shows fully integrated and near optimal dynamic balance.
- Able to simultaneously coordinate most motor and fundamental movement skills.

Flexibility

- Undertakes an individualised stretching program on a daily basis.
- Able to implement - at appropriate times - dynamic mobility exercises, active and passive static stretching techniques, and PNF stretching. Understands neural desensitization exercises and able to perform as instructed.
- Able to perform self-administered stretching sessions or participate in yoga or Pilates sessions, where appropriate.

Speed/Agility

Sensitive to improvements post PHV

- Able to or visibly working to move efficiently at higher speeds in linear (particularly forward), lateral and multi-directional (i.e. agility) fashions.
- Able to run to set movement patterns on-court (in practice and in match play).
- Capable of maintaining movement form when using speed-resisted and speed-assisted training methods.

Strength (including injury prevention)

- Able to perform all single and multi-joint lifts with appropriate resistances and correct form.
- Capable of safely performing closed/open-chain exercises using both machine and free weights, with increasing resistances.
- Able to perform exercises correctly with Thera - Bands, Swiss balls, balance boards and the Pilates reformer with increasing loads.
- Able to coordinate Olympic lifts with appropriate loads.
- Able to follow an individualised resistance training programme, and beginning to have input into the related goals.
- Maintains sound core (i.e. abdominal and lower back muscle) strength and shoulder/scapula control.
- Possesses or working to develop acceptable bilateral and antagonist: agonist strength ratios.
- Able to complete RM tests and work to RM ranges or %RM.
Power

- Visibly improving jumps and hops for distance and height.
- Generates higher velocities and covers larger distances in sidearm and over arm medicine ball throws.
- Capable of safely performing contrast or complex training sessions (i.e. loaded repetition followed by unloaded repetition).
- Able to maintain correct form in performing loaded (through drop height or weight) polymeric exercise.

Aerobic endurance

- Able to complete both specific on-court and off-court endurance training sessions aimed at elevating lactate threshold and VO2 max.
- Able to use heart rate monitors and RPE scales to monitor workload.

Anaerobic endurance

- Able to tolerate lactate through repetitious high-intensity efforts on-court and off-court.
- Able to use heart rate monitors and RPE scales to monitor workload (Rated Perceived Exertion Scale).

Multi-sports experience/Cross training

- Can add a variety to training, while also having specific physical transfer to performance.
- May be prescribed to facilitate recovery.

Footwork

- Able to more quickly cover and recover from all balls, especially inside-out shots.
- Uses feet to allow weapon to be consistently used from 66-75% of the baseline.
- Visibly improving movement and positioning through approach and to volley.
- Able to move and jump backward efficiently and effectively to both forehand and backhand smash.
Fitness testing /screening

- Performs a full battery of fitness tests, including all appropriate laboratory or diagnostic tests, at least twice annually.
- Participates in annual physiotherapy screenings and regular medical check-ups and receives frequent massage and physiotherapeutic treatment.

Ancillary capacities

- Individually responsible for warm-ups and cool-downs.
- Able to follow individualised linear and undulating periodisation for all physical abilities.
- Better understands and endeavours to implement concept of peaking and tapering.
- Meets specific athlete dietary requirements, and follows individualised pre-, during and post-match nutrition and hydration strategies.
- Understands and implements specific carbohydrate loading strategies.
- Able to make educated food choices when travelling.
- Able to implement strategies (e.g. hot/cold treatments) to recover physically from intense training, competitions and airplane travel.
- Performs more sophisticated self-monitoring, especially of training workloads (e.g. heart rate, RPE scales).
- Keeps daily training and well-being diaries.

Physical Activity Time (PAT)

65-75% or 16-20 hours tennis and 25-35% or 6-8 hours non-tennis per week

Technical development

Core Characteristic - linked perception

- Able to perceive cues related to player’s court position, racquet preparation/swing and body alignment.
- Responds earlier to differential ball speeds and spins.
- Takes a larger number of balls on the rise, off both sides and on returns.
- Able to better play behind moving opponent (especially from inside-out/inside-in forehand set-up).
- Able to perceive and more quickly respond to high speed serves.
- Able to adjust shot in response to surprise approach to the net (e.g. serve and volley or poaching).
Assumes sound support/hitting positions.

- Automated stance/tactical intention relationship.
- Able to hit with increasing velocity off all supports (i.e. two feet, back foot, front foot, outside foot, inside foot).
- Optimises use of lower body in stroke production.
- Maintains balanced, neutral shoulder-head alignment.

Swing and ball control

- Able to generate appropriate racquet head speed and trajectory to create shorter crosscourt and inside-out angles from on, behind, and in front of the baseline.
- Able to hit heavy topspin and slice shots and serves, as well as flatten out strokes at high speed.
- Able to create more acute angles by hitting through the ball, as well as around the ball (e.g. angled groundstroke) and across the ball (e.g. high backhand, inside-out forehand) with increasing topspin and speed.
- Able to control half-volleys to all court widths and lengths, and drop shots to all court widths.
- Able to hold court position and stance, hitting half-volley ground strokes.

Optimising stroke technique (i.e. adding velocity, adaptability to court surface and situation) to compete on the professional tour.

Serve

- Possesses a powerful serve.
- Developed ability for trunk rotations to contribute positively to stroke velocity.
- Optimal use of legs.
- Able to hit serves with increased slice and ‘kick’.

Return of Serve

- Generates increasing racquet head speeds, and improved differentiation/use of block and drive returns.
- Better able to adjust body position to deal with body serves.
Forehand

- Optimal use of lower body and trunk rotations.
- Capable of loading on outside or back leg to drive forward/upward into the stroke.
- Exhibits balance and control when leaving the ground.
- Adjusts preparation to the situation with a variety of footwork options.
- Robust technique allows for consistent contact points when hitting on the rise.

Two-handed backhand

- Able to use a shorter, higher preparation depending on the grip.
- Employs preparation and stance appropriate to the situation.
- Displays consistent stroke patterns and loads increasingly on the back or outside leg to drive forward and upward.

On the two-handed backhand, the player should be able to use a shorter, higher preparation depending on the grip.

One-handed backhand

- Fully integrated use of legs and optimal use of hip and shoulder rotation.
- Higher (amplified) backswing with improved leverage during the forward swing.
- Preparation is appropriate to the situation.
- Able to hit open stance backhand returns, passing shots, and higher balls.
- Able to play backhand slice to position at different speeds and with different trajectories.

Volley

- Able to volley for depth and angle, inside-out and crosscourt.
- Able to cope with balls of different heights and coordinate grip changes/footwork accordingly.
- Manipulates centre of gravity and base of support to maximize net coverage.
- Ensures contact point is out in front and to the side with the weight transferring forward.
- Exhibits good use of non-racquet arm to support a compact swing.
- Uses one-handed backhand volley.
- Able to play drive volleys at higher speeds whilst maintaining precision.
Smash

- Wins points.
- Able to smash with higher velocities and to position.
- Able to smash from all court positions.
- Exhibits increasing control and generates higher racquet velocities with backhand smash.

Approach Shots

- Able to drive and slice approach shots from varying court locations.

Tactical development

Core Characteristics

- Able to formulate and implement advanced singles tactics in all five game situations.
- Able to anticipate opponent’s shot tendencies from tactical standpoints (based on court position, racquet preparation and body alignment) as well as technical standpoints (based on technical limitations) - particularly during baseline play and on return of serve.
- Able to detect/anticipate preferred plays (i.e. tendencies) by opponents on big points.

Develop his/her game-style

- Able to implement preferred game plans on all surfaces.
- Improving use of individual strengths.
- Able to serve and immediately attack with preferred groundstroke or volley.
- Plays sequences of shots to achieve more specific desired outcomes.
- Better able to attack, counter-attack and defend against all styles of play.
- Able to dictate play, winning or losing on their terms.

Displays improved decision-making

- Exploits weaknesses and seizes on hesitation of an opponent in match play.
- Plays percentages, but selects appropriate times to take educated risks.
- Chooses appropriate times to vary rhythm or lift tempo.
- Correctly decides to play behind or at opponent.
Exhibits a developing tennis intelligence

- Actively analyses an opponent during match play.
- Able to execute and adapt specific game plans.
- Can effectively develop and implement a ‘plan B’.
- Performs increasingly insightful match analysis.
- Able to play in all weather conditions.
- Completes a tactical logbook, ‘scouts’ opponents and developing tactics to counter all game styles.
- Exploits court geometry.
- Able to interpret the most important and player-specific match statistics (e.g. percentage of errors made when attempting to hit a forcing shot, winning percentage on second serves).
- Proficient at using video-based simulation training to facilitate decision-making.
- Understands value and need for deliberate practice of all skills.

Play in five game situations

Serve

- Able to use serve to provide ‘cheap’ points.
- Able to adapt serve (and second shot) strategies - varying placement, spin and speed to enhance unpredictability.

Return-of-serve

- Able to anticipate returns based on the server’s body cues.
- Implements and adjusts different two-shot combinations (e.g. big X).
- Proficient at attacking first and second serves.

Baseline play

- Makes better decisions regarding when to change rally/shot direction.
- Proficient at disguising drop shots.

Approach the net

- Able to vary approach shots with slice and/or drive.
- Able to optimise net coverage through understanding of court geometry and opponent’s position.
Able to win the point with the first volley or with a combination of volleys/smashes.
Increasingly proficient at surprising opponents with ‘sneak in’ after powerful serves and ground strokes.
Correctly decides when and where to hit to, and when to chip and charge.

Passing

Makes better decisions regarding when and where to pass with a drive, lob or angled dink.
Proficient at disguising intent on passing shots.
Effectively implements a variety of two-ball pass combinations.

Doubles

Makes appropriate decisions regarding first volley after serve and return.
Able to use different serving and returning formations to good effect.
Able to implement poach (per reaction, anticipation and command) as part of any serving or returning formation.
Able to use effectively send and receive signals from partner.
Plays the percentages well.

Mental development

Motivation

Intrinsically motivated.
Shows pride in performance.
Willing to seek answers and solve problems.
Has a love of learning and playing.
Displays 100% effort. Equipped with the philosophy of ‘making opponent earn the point’.
Able to independently set and work towards SMARTER performance and outcome goals.
Able to formulate tennis-specific and life goals.
Motivated to use visualisation to solve tactical problems, and enhance self-confidence.
Concentration

- Individualises use of concentration strategies in practice and in match play.
- Able to sustain concentration in match play over the course of consecutive tournaments.
- Adjusts and individualises use of rituals and routines between points and games.
- Proficient at maintaining or shifting concentration when confronted with distractions (e.g. disputes with umpires, noisy crowd or practice environment, poorly-behaved opponent).
- Able to work in the ‘here and now’.

Control of thoughts

- Displays positive thinking and self-esteem.
- Experiences and enjoys improvement in technical, tactical, physical, psychological or competitive performance.
- Willing to try in game play what has been practiced, with a view to achieving performance and long-term outcome goals.
- Subconsciously maintains positive body language on-court. Uses power walk.
- Proficient at using cognitive reframing techniques (i.e. changing negative self-talk to positive self-talk).
- Displays a positive approach and assertiveness in sustaining a lead.

Emotional Control

- Proficient at dealing with pressures associated with international competition and regular travel.
- Able to control breathing patterns.
- Automates mistake management.
- Aware of and able to control optimal performance state.
- Individualised use of on-court and off-court performance routines before, during and/or after practice and matches.
- Able to prepare for different environments (e.g. heat, cold, altitude, rain) and adapt to unexpected weather changes during match play.
- Understands and able to use momentum, and able to neutralise opponents momentum.
Other psychological competencies

- Self-disciplined.
- Formulates, follows and reviews match plans and able to independently detect and correct performance mistakes.
- Demonstrates a positive attitude toward learning and general optimism.
- Capable of maintaining intensity of training without supervision.
- May show adaptive perfectionist tendencies, but able to accept results and move on.
- Increasingly independent and responsible.
- Able to effectively manage time.
- Maintains a success file.
- Coachable.
- Optimistic.
- Competitive.

Personal

- Continued personal development.
- Displays continued respect for volunteers, officials, coaches and other players. Aware of posture and need to make eye contact with tournament officials and volunteers.
- Proficient at giving post-match speeches, thanking people, and speaking positively about opponents.
- Shows sportsperson-like conduct.
- Appreciative of the resources required to achieve optimal performance, as well as the benefits received from tennis. Willing to give back to the development of young players.
- Enjoys responsibility and spirit of team competition and doubles play.
- Displays leadership skills.
- Able to deal with social problems (e.g. peer pressure, illicit substances).
- Possesses a support network.
- Able to speak to and look at interviewers and capable of developing rapport with reporters and reveal personality during interviews.
- Achieves appropriate balance between school, sport and social activities.
- Respects cultural diversity.
Lifestyle

- Individualisation of ancillary supports.
- Refined self-monitoring.
- Plan career and sport options.
- Increased knowledge on hydration and nutrition.
- Preparation for different environments e.g. heat, cold, rain, altitude.
- Injury prevention and recovery.
- Learn how to handle jet lag and cope with extended travel and different diets.
- Diagnostic tests to identify individual needs of player.
- Deals effectively with social problems e.g. alcohol, culture, peer pressure, school, jobs.
- Develop a support network.
- Awareness of relevant scholarships.
- Time management, academic/tennis balance.

Parental role and support tips

- Responds to the various demands and expectations placed on their child by fostering an optimal learning environment, rather than creating new demands or pressures.
- Keeps winning and losing in a healthy perspective.
- Content to have their children focus solely on school and sport achievement, alleviating any pressure on players to find part-time work.
- Assists child to fight setbacks that might hinder training progression.
- Makes a continued financial and time commitment to their child.
- Prepared to make sacrifices in their personal and/or family lives in order to afford the child optimal training conditions, without creating additional pressures.
- Helps guide child in their potential involvement with player agents.
- Evaluates what's best for child's tennis and education and agrees with child and coach/teachers as to merits of distance education versus continued schooling, versus relocation.
- Aware of the advantages and disadvantages of university scholarships.
**Education**

**Importance of education**

- Understands that education remains a priority but considers/pursues distance education options.
- Displays competent computer/internet use for leisure and education.
- Aware of the advantages and disadvantages of university scholarships.
- Familiar with the education/self-improvement options developed by the professional tours.
- May be presented with additional opportunities to refine a second language.

**Competition/Tournaments**

**ITN**

The participants entering this Phase will be allocated an ITN 10 and progress accordingly.

The top eight ranked under 18 players will be allocated an ITN 4.

**Competition/tournaments guidelines**

- Periodised tournament schedule (including surface considerations, prioritisation of events,) with 3-5 annual peak performances planned.
- Presented with the opportunity to participate in, on average, no less than 5 hours of competition per week.
- Compete in 20-30 tournaments (comprising 4-8 International juniors, 2-3 National juniors, 4-5 National prize money, 3-5 Futures (M)/$10,000 (F), 1-4 Challengers (M)/$25,000-$75,000 (F), WTA/ATP as appropriate, 1-2 Team) annually.
- Per year, players should play 65-80 singles and 30-45 doubles matches.
- Girls are more likely to make a more immediate transition to the pro tour. Boys should play 50% age group; 50% above age group or professional/open tennis.
Phase 6:  
The Training to Win Phase  
– PERFORM.  
Age: Males 18+/Females 17+ years

**Level of Coach - Level 1 - Level 2 - Level 3**

The minimum standard coach required to work in this phase varies depending on whether the players involved are recreational, club or performance players.

A Level 1 Coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 1 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop beginner to intermediate players of all ages and under 9 regional standard players.

A Level 2 Coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 2 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop intermediate to advanced players of all ages and performance players up to 12 years of age.

A Level 3 Coach has completed the Tennis Ireland Level 3 Coach Education Programme and is qualified to work with and develop players at all levels.

The Play and Stay Assistant, Tennis Assistant 1 and Tennis Assistant 2 can assist with part of this phase, but only under the direction and in the presence of a Tennis Ireland qualified coach.

**Physical development**

**Motor and Fundamental Movement Skills**

- Possesses excellent motor and fundamental movement skills.

**Physical proficiency abilities**

- Displays excellent balance and rhythm.
- Maintains coordinative proficiency through scheduling appropriate warm-up activities and cross-training initiatives.
- Able to reprogramme (or belatedly adjust) movement patterns having anticipated incorrectly.
Flexibility

- Undertakes an individualised stretching program as necessary and on a daily basis.
- Able to implement at appropriate times - dynamic mobility exercises, active and passive static stretching techniques, and PNF stretching. Able to perform neural desensitisation exercises.
- Participates in yoga or Pilates sessions when appropriate and/or as desired.
- Exhibits appropriate levels of muscle and connective tissue flexibility, and joint laxity, such that power development in both stroke and movement production can be maximised.

Speed/Agility

Sensitive to improvements post PHV.

- Able to move efficiently at higher speeds in linear (particularly forward), lateral and multidirectional (i.e. agility) fashions.
- Displays optimal dynamic balance.
- Able to run to set movement patterns at higher speeds on-court (i.e. in practice and in match play).
- Capable of maintaining movement form and benefit from using speed-resisted and assisted training methods.
- Able to complete a variety of speed and agility exercises as part of a warm-up.

Strength (including injury prevention)

- Able to perform all multi-joint, single-joint, closed-chain, and open-chain exercises with appropriate resistances and correct form.
- Performs Olympic lifts with appropriate loads.
- Able to safely perform all exercises when unsupervised.
- If necessary, possesses sufficient strength training knowledge to select mechanically-similar exercises based on facilities.
- Maintains sound core strength (i.e. abdominal and lower back muscle), and shoulder/scapula control.
- Continues to monitor and work to acceptable bilateral and antagonist/agonist strength ratios.
- Able to complete all RM tests and work to RM ranges or %RM.
Power

- Visibly working toward maximising upper-body and lower-body rates of force development and peak and average power outputs.
- Capable of safely performing contrast or complex training sessions (i.e. loaded repetition followed by unloaded repetition) and integrating it as appropriate with on-court training sessions when on the road.
- Maintains correct form in performing loaded plyometric exercise (through drop height or weight).
- Familiar with analysis tools that provide for quantitative determination of power expression.
- Able to integrate improvements into stroke production.

Aerobic endurance

- Completes both specific on-court and off-court endurance training sessions, aimed at elevating lactate threshold and VO2 max.
- Uses heart rate monitors and RPE scales to monitor workload.
- Tolerates lactate through repetitious high-intensity efforts on-court and off-court.
- Uses heart rate monitors and RPE scales to monitor workload.

Multi-sports experience/cross-training

- Adds variety to training while also having specific physical transfer to performance.
- May be prescribed to facilitate recovery.

Footwork

- Proficient footwork to and from all court positions, and in the execution of all strokes.
- Uses appropriate foot work to optimise weapon use.

Fitness testing/Screening

- Performs a full battery of fitness tests, including all appropriate laboratory or diagnostic tests, at least twice annually.
- Receives regular massage and physiotherapeutic treatment.
- Receives treatment from select physiotherapists when on the road, and the same physiotherapist when at home.
Ancillary capacities

- Personally responsible for strength and conditioning programme when travelling.
- Able to follow individualised linear and undulating Periodisation to maximise (i.e. in preparatory phases) and maintain (i.e. during lengthy competition phases) improvements.
- Adept at peaking and tapering.
- Optimises nutrition and hydration.
- Accustomed to performing physical training on match days.
- Regularly implement strategies to facilitate physical recovery (e.g. hot/cold treatments).
- Maintains workload monitoring (i.e. heart rate, RPE scales) and keeps daily training and wellbeing diaries.

Physical Activity Time (PAT)

Entirely individualised, influenced by tournament schedule.

Technical development

Core Characteristics

- Technical excellence achieved, all skills are robust and no mechanical flaws exist to jeopardize their performance under stress.
- Able to develop high racquet velocities (horizontal and vertical) but also able to vary rhythm and manipulate tempo from all court positions and on all surfaces.
- Able to improvise, irrespective of situation or surface.
- Able to direct all strokes to all court locations.
- Able to adapt to all court surfaces.

No mechanical flaws exist to jeopardize performance under stress...
**Tactical development**

**Core Characteristics**

- Generally tries to implement the preferred game plan on all surfaces.
- Optimises use of own weapons.
- Able to independently formulate, implement, evaluate and, if necessary, adapt advanced singles tactics in all five game situations.
- Able to effectively adapt tactics to all court surfaces, weather conditions, opponents and situations (e.g. in the presence of unexpected physical impairment/cramps).
- Better able to anticipate opponent’s shot tendencies from tactical standpoints (based on court position, racquet preparation and body alignment) as well as from technical standpoints (based on technical limitations), particularly during baseline play and on return of serve.
- Proficient at detecting and anticipating preferred plays (i.e. tendencies) by the opponent on big points.
- Maintains a scouting diary.

**Mental development**

**Complete Mental Performer**

- Automated, individualised and effective psychological performance enhancement routines (i.e. for concentration, emotional control, motivation, and control of thoughts) in order to bring about optimal performance state.
- Intrinsically motivated.
- Able to plan and prepare and sets and achieves SMARTER goals (goal dedication and drive).
- Individualised use of all post-match strategies to optimise practice, match and tournament performance.
- Possesses general and sports confidence.
- Possesses good imagery ability.
- Able to cope with all the forms of pressure and adversity that are inherent to professional tennis.
- Able to review mental performance (e.g. monitor lapses in concentration and link to performance outcomes).
- Able to independently formulate, follow and review match plans, as well as detect and correct performance mistakes.
- Positive, optimistic and realistic.
- Able to accept results and move on.
- Independent and responsible.
- Self-disciplined.
- Able to effectively manage time.
- Able to maximise resources.
- Methodical and routine-oriented.
- Self-aware and continues to emphasise self-improvement.
- Productive training attitude and approach.
- Competitive.
- Respects and does not underestimate opponent’s ability.

### Personal development

- Able to balance career, relationships and continued education.
- Displays continued respect for and deals appropriately with volunteers, officials, coaches and other players.
- Proficient in giving post match speeches and interviews.
- Increasingly proficient at dealing with the media.
- Possesses good morals and sportsmanship.
- Appreciative of the resources required to achieve optimal performance and endeavors to ‘give back’.
- Good team mate.
- Deals with agents and support network with honesty and integrity.
- Respects cultural diversity.
- Full integration of tennis, career and life goals.

### Lifestyle

- Increased knowledge on all areas of lifestyle.
- Rest and relaxation – knows when and how.
- Frequent breaks are factored in.
- Well developed self-monitoring skills.
- Well developed and integrated sport network/structure.
- Career/sport planning sustained.
Parental role and support tips

- Supports son/daughter’s decision to play full-time professional or varsity tennis.
- May need to provide extra support and strength of character, if there is a slower than expected transition to the top of the professional game.
- Able to continue financial support of their son or daughter, if necessary.
- Continues to foster an optimal learning environment, rather than creating new demands or pressures.
- Keeps winning and losing in a healthy perspective.
- Continues to offer assistance/support during setbacks that might hinder training progression.
- Continues to help guide child in their involvement with player agents.
- Equipped to deal with child’s decision to move out of the family home.

Education

- Makes and reviews major decisions on career (tennis) and education.
- Familiar with mature/age distance education alternatives.
- Undergoes media training.
- Displays competent computer/Internet use for leisure and education, as well as to assist skill analysis.
- Maintains diaries, and performs video-based tactical or anticipation training.
- Participates in education/self-improvement/mentoring options as developed by the professional tours.
- Refines second language and/or attempts to improve lingual skills.

Competition / Tournaments plan

ITN

The participants entering this stage will be allocated an ITN 10 and progress accordingly.

The top 10 ranked Irish players will be allocated an ITN 2 and ATP and WTA players will be allocated an ITN 1.

Players should now be competing in 30-35 professional tournaments annually.
- Periodised tournament schedule (including surface considerations, prioritisation of events) with no less than five peak performances planned.
- Competes in 30-35 professional tournaments annually.
- Player should take part in 85-100 singles matches per year.
- Participation in doubles will be at the discretion of each player and their coach (occasional doubles play may positively transfer to certain aspects of singles performance).
Players who have advanced through the pathway at the highest level in each phase reach the Active for Life Phase in their early to mid-thirties and remain in this phase for the rest of their tennis playing lifetime. There are however players of different ages and abilities entering this phase on a regular basis.

**Level of Coach - Level 1 - Level 2 - Level 3**

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The Play and Stay Assistant, Tennis Assistant 1 and Tennis Assistant 2 can assist with part of this phase, but only under the direction and in the presence of a Tennis Ireland qualified coach.
Physical

- Decrease loads.
- Maintain good healthy habits.
- Keep active through sports participation.

Technical

- Retain skills and develop new ones.

Tactical

- Maintain previously developed skills.
- Play more doubles and veterans tennis.

Personal

- Reset goals.

Lifestyle

- Pursue personal and family goals more strongly.
- Pursue further education/career development.
- Possible engagement in administration, coaching, media/PR.
- Seek transition support, if required.
NOTES AND SOURCES

Player Development Stroke and Tactical Fundamentals: Tennis Australia has produced an excellent illustrated document as a guide for coaches on stroke and tactical fundamentals. International Tennis Federation’s ITN Resources.

This can be viewed at the following link:

Sources

Tennis Ireland’s Building Pathways

Canada’s Sport 4 Life Programme

Sport New Zealand’s Active Start Programme

Tennis Australia’s Player Development

The International Tennis Federation’s ITN Resources