

SPECIAL POPS/ADAPTIVE TENNIS

COACHING GOALS

1. Help each individual athlete realize his/her full potential by creating an environment that promotes both success AND challenge
2. Further social skills and socialization by building “teamwork” and cooperative skill development.

TEACHING APPROACH

“**Athlete-focused**” rather than “performance-focused”. To be a good coach you need to assess **WHO** you are teaching.

1. **BE CURIOUS.** Ask yourself, “what are the strengths and limitations of the individuals I have on the court”? That includes:

CONCEPTUAL SKILLS

- what is their level of language? Do they speak at all? If they do not speak, what is their level of understanding?
- do they understand number or time?
- how capable are they at self-direction?

SOCIAL SKILLS

- self-esteem
- confidence
- attention deficits

PHYSICAL SKILLS

- how is their balance/coordination?
- Physical limitations
 - senses (vision, hearing)
 - lack of muscle mass/tone
 - total body mass/obesity

2. **BE CREATIVE.** Each coach needs to be flexible in presenting and carrying out lesson plans on the court. Choose drills and skill-building activities that reflect the level and needs of the players you are teaching. Try new ways of demonstrating and communicating the game of tennis. It may not “look” like traditional tennis, but if it includes a racquet, ball, net, and movement (one or all of these) and is happening on the tennis court, you are doing a GREAT JOB!

THE IMPORTANCE OF “PRIDE” IN SPECIAL POPS COACHING

Considering the specific characteristics of your players on court, each coach needs to remember to take “PRIDE” in(to) every lesson plan and encounter with the athletes. **That is:**

- P:** PRAISE
R: REPETITION
I: INSTRUCTIONS SIMPLE
D: DEMONSTRATE VISUALLY
E: ENCOURAGE (A GROUP IDENTITY)

PRIDE language is:

- **clear**
- **concrete**
- **concise** (we use “*buzz*” words for certain skills)
- **consistent** (same cues/*buzz* words for same stroke)
- **positive** (reinforcing small steps in the right direction)
- **interactional/active** (directly encouraging either verbal or physical response from each individual player being spoken to)

FORMAT FOR SPECIAL POPS CLINIC

1. Greeting/welcome
2. Warm-up exercises/stretching
3. Developmental skills activities
4. Tennis play: strokes, court positioning, point play
5. Wrap-up. Summarize time

Greeting/Welcome

This is the time coaches focus on greeting each athlete by name. (Each athlete should be wearing a name tag to help with this.) Introduce yourself, and then encourage them to do the same. If you have an athlete that is non-verbal or unwilling to speak, it is up to the coach to introduce them to the group and welcome them by name. This may seem like an insignificant way to use the time, but it is a very important part of our coaching job. The message to the individual athlete is that THEY are important and every time you call them specifically by THEIR NAME you are acknowledging that they have personal worth. It also is an opportunity to demonstrate appropriate social interaction and to encourage them to participate in establishing and building social relationships in respectful and positive ways.

Warm-up Exercises

Coaches are encouraged (especially early in the season), to remind the group why you spend time warming up. Simply put: "It warms up your body so lots of blood gets to the muscles and they work better when you use them on the tennis court". You can also take this opportunity to encourage them to do some of these exercises during the week to increase their physical health and conditioning at home. Always, our goal is to have this

tennis experience enhance their quality of life for the hour or so spent on court, but we also want it to carry over into their time OFF the court and improve their overall physical, social, and emotional wellbeing.

For appropriate warm-up activities you can start with some of the ideas listed here and then build on them from your own experience and based on the ability level of your athletes.

From the start of warm-up until you leave the court, remember to teach and maintain a safe learning space by: monitoring court spacing (safe space), racquet control (hug the racquet when not in use), keeping loose balls off the practice space.

There is a developmental progression even in doing “warm-up”!! Be creative and enjoy!

1. Start with arms:

- Arm circles forward and back
- Row the boat- arm pulls
- Arm curls
- Make tight fist and release

2. Torso:

- Stretch to the sky, down towards the ground;
- Twist at the waist

3. Legs:

- Up on toes as raise/extend arms out to side
- Knee hugs
- High knees

4. Whole body:

- Frankenstein walk: Walk with high straight legs and straight swinging Arms.
- Duck walk: high knees turned out to the side
- Skip
- Jumping Jacks
- Run/walk-Stop: have them run or walk and freeze when you say “stop”

5. Learn parts of the court: go through names of the different parts of the court and then have them jog/walk/hop/skip to the part of the court you call out.

6. Run the lines: on one side of the court you use the base-line, ally lines and service line; they have to keep toes pointed toward the net at all times which means they side-shuffle along the base-line and service lines and jog forward and backward (on the balls of the feet) on the alley lines.

7. Line hops: use the two alley lines. Have them hop side-ways across one line into the alley and then out of the alley across the other line. They come back the other way. Encourage light steps on the balls of the feet or use the buzz-term “happy feet”.

8. Shadow drills: Have the players moving along certain lines of the court (usually walking is best) using racquet and practicing “*buzz words*” (hug racquet, ready position, turn/open door, touch the sky, stop sign, split-step) or a specific stroke that you focused on last week or will be teaching this week.

Developmental Skill Activities

Following warm-up activities at the beginning of each clinic, you engage the athletes in specific activities that target skills needed by a tennis player:

- Physical: coordination, agility, balance/footwork (very challenging for those who are overweight or have poor muscle tone), reaction speed, and control.
- visual tracking (especially difficult with visually impaired and some visual processing disorders)
- eye-hand coordination; hand-ball, eye-hand/racquet-ball

Many of the ideas listed below can be tailored to work with athletes at different skill levels. The equipment used may vary i.e. the size of the ball used may range from beach ball, to 8 inch, to any sizes of the “dot” tennis balls we use at Special Pops or you can also use bean-bags for many of the toss-catch activities. Determine the level or levels of athletes on your court and have a variety of ball sizes and equipment on hand.

During each clinic, plan on doing 2-3 of the activities listed below. Or, develop other skill-building activities that more specifically address the developmental needs of the athletes in your group.

Tennis Activities That Build Developmental Skills

(The first 5 activities are done without tennis racquets)

1. Ball Drop: Volunteer holds two balls, one in each hand with arms raised and out to the side, facing the athlete. Volunteer drops one ball and the athlete needs to try to catch it off of the bounce. The volunteer does not tell which ball they are going to drop. It is easier if the athlete stands closer and harder as the athlete moves away. If your athletes are able, you can pair them up to take turns being the “dropper” and the “catcher”. This activity is good for working on reaction time, coordination, and footwork.

2. Cone Weaving: place 8 cones line. Have athletes weave in and out of the cones. You can have them walk it, run it, do “side step” between cones. Work on small quick steps.
3. Hopscotch dots: Place three sets of dots on the court in a hop scotch pattern (1-2-1) Have athletes jump with one foot on the first dot and then “split step” on the ones side by side. Vocalize the term split step so they become familiar with what that means. Can start without the racquet and then add the dimension of holding the racquet in “ready position” as they split step.
4. Hoop bounce (or dot-bounce): Place several hula hoops or dots around one half of the court. Each athlete has a ball. Have them start at the first hoop/dot, bounce their ball in/on the target and catch it 3 times (or whatever number you set), and move to the next one. You can have them go around to each “target” multiple times.

This may seem like a silly activity but many of our athletes either do not have the muscle coordination, or are too nervous and tense to just drop and catch a ball. Yet this is an important skill as many times on the court they will be asked to “bounce and hit the ball”. The “bounce” has to happen in a controlled way.

5. Cone catch: This one follows well in a progression of ball/eye/hand coordination. Each athlete has a cone. The goal is to catch the bounced ball in the cone. You can have the coach bounce to the player, or have pairs of athletes with one taking a turn at bouncing and the other catching (and reverse roles after a time) or you can have each athlete bounce and catch their own ball. It depends, ALWAYS, on the developmental level of your athletes. You can also move into having the athlete catch a ball tossed in the air. Again, this can be coach-led, done in pairs, or individually.
6. Toss-bounce-bump-catch: This is a developmental step above the cone catch. Have each athlete hold a tennis racquet. Toss a ball up (about head level so it bounces high enough) so it bounces in front of them. They let it bounce and then “bump”/tap it with the racquet face turned up, and then catch it either with their free hand or trap it between their hand and racquet. You can progress to doing this with

knuckles up (back-hand) bump and catch. Then to having them toss the ball themselves. Encourage racquet control and eye-hand coordination. As athletes get better at this you can increase the number of times they bounce-bump before catching the ball.

7. Ball balance: Using one side of the court, line up 6 cones along the net (see set-up photo). On three of the cones at the net, balance a tennis ball. The athlete starts at the baseline with a ball on his/her racquet and walks with it to an empty cone at the net and places their ball on it. Then they pick up a ball from a cone that the coach placed a ball on and balance it on their racquet and take it back to the next athlete in line. This is great to do as a relay once they have had a chance to “practice”. If you have more advanced players, you can have them **bounce** the ball from baseline to net instead of carrying on their racquet.

This next set of activities involve partnering the athletes together or partner an athlete with a coach if they are not at a level that they can work with another athlete. As a coach you need to assess the athletes on your court and if you have enough coaches you can do some athletes in pairs and some one-on-one with a coach. **Remember, our goal is to help athletes to be SUCCESSFUL at the level of their developmental capabilities.**

8. Ball Bounce: (Level 1). Pair up athletes and have them stand 5-6 feet apart. Put a ring or dot between them. One starts by bouncing a ball off of the ring/dot to the partner who then catches it and bounces it back. See if they can do it 5/7/10 times (whatever number you challenge them with) in a row. When they toss the ball, have them turn their feet and shoulders sideways to their partner so it mimics how they will hit and/or receive a ball when they have the racquet in their hand. It is good to demonstrate this with another coach before you have them do it. Turned sideways to the partner and encourage the partner to turn to the side to catch the ball.

For the more advanced athletes you can have them use their racquet and gently “bump” the ball to the partner who then gently bumps it back. Encourage soft bounces off of the dot/ring target, soft “bumps” with the racquet, and turning the shoulders/feet to “open the door” with the racquet to hit and receive the ball. Visual demonstration is key to teaching this population!!

9. Ball Bounce: (Level 2). Use hula hoops. Set up a hula hoop in front of each athlete with athletes about 8 or more feet apart. The athlete stands behind his/her hoop and tries to toss the ball so it bounces IN the hoop in front of the **partner**. The partner catches and tosses it back into the hoop in front of his/her partner. This is a good one to set up with scoring (coach may have to keep score) so each time they toss the ball so it bounces in the opposing hoop, they receive a point. You can decide on any number to “win”. The progression with this activity is from both athletes tossing the ball with no racquets, to one trying to bump/tap the ball so it bounces into the opposing hoop (and other athlete still using hands), to both athletes having racquets and “catching” with free hand or trapping on racquet, to both hitting back and forth with racquets without stopping to catch the ball.
10. Ball-Bump-Hoop: Have one partner hold up a hula hoop and have the other partner bounce a ball and “bump” it through the hoop. First athlete hits 5 balls through the hoop and then the partners switch positions. Best to set this up so the “hoop-holder” is close to the backstop so the balls don’t roll too far away. Also, set each “hitter” up so they have easy access to balls. This way you don’t have each pair running around retrieving one ball each time.
11. Ball toss/racquet catch: In this activity have the athlete;
- balance a ball on the face of the racquet
 - slowly tilt the racquet until the ball falls off and bounces off the ground
 - catch the ball again on the racquet face (they can use their other hand to “trap it on the racquet if necessary)

Encourage racquet control and knee bend as they “catch” the ball. Can also reverse the racquet so knuckles are on top.

Additional ideas for encouraging social/team skills (Note all these can be done with appropriate balls for different levels). It is often good to do these relay races at the end of your clinic session as a fun group activity.

- **Beach Ball relay:** Divide the players into two lines with all of them facing forward, one player behind the next (It may also be helpful to have them straddle a line). The ball is started at the back of the line. With feet remaining facing forward the next in line twists back to their **right** (forehand side) to receive the ball from behind them. They pass it this way from player to player until it gets to the front of the line and that person twists around and passes it behind them to the **left** (back hand side) to get it to the back of the line. Whoever gets it up and back first wins. This is a great activity to get them turning to receive a ball.

More beach ball ideas:

- Two Athletes pass beach ball back and forth underhand toss, then overhand toss.
Then move farther apart and bounce ball between athletes and catch. (you can place a hula hoop in between them to give a target for them to bounce the ball)
You can also do this passing back and forth over the net.
- Form a circle. Hit beachball up in air and try to keep in air. The coach can stand in the middle of the circle to facilitate or can throw ball to each athlete one at a time and have them hit it high back to them. If the “hitting” gets too wild, try having the coach in the middle and throwing it to the athlete who catches it and throws it back.
- Have athletes on one side of net (Volley). Set up several hula hoops on the ground on other side of the net. Throw a beach ball to the athlete who you have standing volley-distance from the net with their racquet. athlete have them try to aim it into a hula hoop. You can either remove a hula hoop if it is hit or you can leave them until all have had a turn, and then make a game by removing them.
- You can practice forehands, backhands and volleys with beach balls. Can have athletes stand in line next to each other and each hit a few

forehands and then move your next 3 up for their turn, or you can make one line and have athletes come up one at a time and have them hit 3 balls as they move left to right across the net. (This is the Three then Flee method and then you have them hustle back to the end of the line). Repeat with back hands and volleys)

- Bounce beach balls to the ground and then bounce beach balls on top of racket. Make it a goal first 5x then increase.
- Can form two lines and pass the beach ball down the line and back using racquets or hands and have a race to see who wins.
- Have athletes partner off. One athlete has a ball, one has a racket. Have one roll the ball on the ground to the partner who then has to trap the ball with the racket and push it back to the partner. Then switch who has the racquet and who is rolling with hands.
- Partners each a racket. Place a ball (maybe easier with foam ball) between the two athletes' rackets. They then have to walk from the baseline to the net and back together while keeping the ball sandwiched between the rackets. This is a great teamwork building activity.
- Ball-on-Racquet Relay: Divide players into two teams (Team A and Team B). Have Team A line up on one side of the net while Team B lines up on the opposite side. Have the first person in line on Team A approach the net, balancing the ball in the center of the racquet. The first person in line on Team B also approaches the net. The drill's object is for players to exchange balls at the net without it falling from their racquets. If the ball hits the ground, a miss is recorded. The player receiving the ball must relay it back to his line. Have players repeat the process. When players complete their tasks, the team sits down on the court. The team with the least number of misses wins. You can also have them pick up the ball and put it on their racquet if it drops and continue on and the team that completes a cycle of all players getting a turn, first, is the "winner".
- Caterpillar: Have teams of four athletes stand side by side in a row. As soon as one has passed the ball to his or her teammate's racquet, he or she goes to the end of the line and receives the ball again as it is passed down the line. You can challenge them to get their line from the net to the baseline this

way. The game can become competitive in the form of a relay race. Place the first member of each team on a starting line. The object is to be the first team to arrive at a designated finish line in caterpillar fashion without dropping the ball. When the ball is dropped, the team must return to the starting line where the ball is put back into play. This game could also be lengthened by having teams reach a given point and then return to the starting line in caterpillar fashion.

- Dribble Relay: Have each player dribble a ball with his or her racquet while running to a specified spot. Upon reaching the marked spot, he or she must turn around and run back to the relay's starting point while carrying the ball on the face of the racquet.
- Line up an equal number of players on both ends of the court. Have each team dribble the perimeter of one side of the court. Race teams against each other or try to beat the clock.
- Walk the Dog: Athlete places the ball on the ground (large ball to start for lower-functioning populations). Person gently taps the ball with the racquet, along the ground between alley lines, to and from the baseline and net, or around the perimeter of the court. (This can be done as a relay race.) You can also use cones and have them push it along the ground in and out of the cones.

Adaptive tennis approach to teaching the game

This is the part of the clinic that you focus on **stroke development** and teaching them what it feels like to hit balls, with a racquet, over a net, between players. What you start working on each week, and how you progress through the season, is dependent on the developmental level of the athletes in your group. If the developmental level is low, the coach may only get as far as having them stand near the net and learn to “volley” a ball tossed on their racquet. As they get more advanced, the coach works on having them hit the ball after a bounce (the forehand and backhand strokes). Then you advance them by moving them further and further from the net and try to hit it over. ****Always assess the abilities of the athletes on your court and adjust your teaching toward them having success in first HITTING the ball, and then hitting the ball OVER THE NET.**

The best progression for teaching the strokes in adaptive tennis is,

1. forehand volley,
2. backhand volley,
3. forehand ground stroke,
4. backhand ground stroke,
5. over-head,
6. serve,
7. lob.

The following is a description of how to teach the progression of each stroke in adaptive tennis. You will see that most of the strokes have “*buzz*”

words included in the teaching description. These are words that adaptive tennis coaches have found helpful in communicating stroke concepts to the athletes. A pictorial demonstration of these buzz words can be found at the end of this manual . (Many thanks to our marvelous tennis athletes and talented photographer, George Schminke).

The information that follows is to help you embrace a general framework for teaching adaptive tennis and is not meant as a strict lesson plan for you to follow. **Above all, remember that our overriding goal in all of Special Pops Tennis is FUN not FAME!**

Forehand Volley

When introducing this stroke, you can say, “this is the kind of shot we hit when we are close to the net, the ball is high, and we are hitting the ball before it bounces on our side.

Buzz-words: “bump” “stop sign”/”high five”(for racquet position). As with every stroke you teach, it is helpful to place targets where you would like them to direct the ball (down and away from you, rather than high in the air and at your head).

Teaching progression:

1. Catch a ball tossed head level or slightly higher with hand out front. (“high five”). If they cannot catch it at least see if they can hit/bump the ball with their hand.
2. When you transition to the racquet, you may want to have everyone do a “shadow” drill of the stroke.
3. Hold racquet with “hand-shake” grip and raised like a “stop sign”. “Bump or “punch” the ball out in front of the body with the face of the racquet.
4. If the athlete is hitting too hard, or missing, have them start with their hand all the way up the throat of the racquet and slowly move it down.
5. Progression is from short practice on one side of the net (coach is tossing the ball up in the air to the player from a position beside the player) , to standing close to net and hitting over the net (the ball comes to them), to standing further back and “stepping to the ball” (they go to the ball).

6. The transition then goes from just “getting it over the net (anywhere), to volleying to targets.

Backhand Volley

This, of course, is similar to teaching the forehand volley since it is a high ball, hit out of the air, close to the net. The difference is that they are hitting it over their non-dominant shoulder and with the **back** of their hand (or knuckles) turned toward the approaching ball. It is very important for them to have the proper hand positioning and shoulder turn or else the temptation is to hit on the wrong side of the strings. If the forehand volley is the “stop sign” the back-hand volley is hitting with the **back** of the stop sign. It is helpful to do shadow drills to help them see/feel the difference in the two shots. Progression is from ball coming to them, to them increasing their movement to the ball.

Forehand Groundstroke

Explain that this is the stroke we use when the ball has bounced and is coming toward the side that we are holding our racquet.

Be sure you check to see if you have any left-handed athletes in your group and adjust your “feeds” and individual instruction accordingly.

Buzz words specific to this stroke are “bounce”, “open the door” (turn), “bump” “kiss your shoulder” or just say “finish over your shoulder” (follow through).

Teaching progression:

1. Bounce and catch the ball with the dominant hand. Make sure they turn and toss from the side of their body and turn and receive from the side of the body. You can do this between coach and athlete, or between pairs of athletes, depending on the level of the athletes.
2. Bounce, turn/open the door, and ‘bump’ the ball with the flat of their hand, finish with both hands over the shoulder”.
3. Next try with the racquet. Go through the stroke with shadow drills first. Model a good body/shoulder turn and then, instead of the flat of the hand, you encourage them to hit the ball with the face/”eyes” of their racquet and then finish over the shoulder. By having them contact the ball with the “eyes of the racquet” it prevents them from turning the wrist

over while hitting the ball.

4. Levels 1-2 can be done without using a net. Once you have them swinging the racquet it is a good idea to have them standing at the service line to receive feeds so they are able to have space to “hit through” the ball. It is helpful to put cones as targets deep in the court to show them where this stroke is supposed to go. Doing so, encourages control in distance and direction.
5. If the athlete is hitting too hard or missing, have them choke up on the racquet to gain more control. If the athlete is having difficulty directing the ball in the court, over the net, encourage them to hit the ball with the “face/eyes” of the racquet. Eliminate the “finish” and get them to turn and contact the ball with the “eyes” of their racquet and “bump” over the net. After they get that part mastered, you can have them finish the swing over the shoulder.
6. As the athlete develops the forehand your focus is to help them: gain more racquet control for distance and direction over the net (set up targets); improve footwork and movement toward the ball.

Relay to practice forehand ground stroke: two lines at the baseline. Each side has 10-15 balls (you decide based on number and ability of athletes). First in line takes a ball and moves to the service line, bounces the ball and hits it over the net with a forehand stroke. For beginners you can set the goal as “just get it over the net” and as the athletes advance the goal gets more specific, i.e. they must get it INSIDE the court lines, cross-court, short in the service box, etc.

Back-hand Groundstroke

Buzz words: open the door (turn), hands in your pocket (whichever is the non-dominant “pocket”), finish over your shoulder.

1. Bounce ball to backhand side of athlete and have them step, turn, catch with two hands on the non-dominant side.
2. Back-hand grip is “shaking hands”; or put racquet under non-dominant arm (butt out) and reach around and pull it out like a warrior unsheathing a sword.

3. Do a shadow drill using the correct grip and positioning of the racquet to receive the ball on the backhand side : turn/open door, hands in your pocket (for racquet back position), bump, finish over your shoulder
4. Bounce to back-hand side of athlete in service box on other side of the net and have them hit over the net.
5. If the player is hitting into the net or too hard, start with the grip further up the racquet and slowly move back down as there is more control. Also, encouraging less backswing can help with control and distance.
6. As with all the other strokes, as the player advances in ability, the coach has the athlete stand further back in the court, and feed the ball to make them go **to the ball** instead of the ball coming directly to them.
7. This stroke may be very difficult for the athlete to learn. If you have a player who is really struggling, simplify! Have them start turned sideways to the net with the racquet already back and then feed the ball directly to their racquet. Tell them when to swing in order to hit the ball from that position. Once they are able to get the correct body and racquet placement, the rest can be added on as they improve. **. If they are unable to hit the ball over the net, start with the players lined up facing the back fence and feed balls to see if they can just get the feel of hitting the ball from the backhand side into the fence.

Fun drill: two lines of athletes on opposite sides of net (same side of the court). The Coach for each line is positioned across the net from the athletes; each feeding to the cross-court line of players. That means, one coach is feeding a cross-court backhand shot (unless they are left-handed) and the other coach is feeding to the forehand. The athlete at the front of the line hits a ball and then (runs/walks briskly) to the other side of the net (player on the add side goes around the net-post to the right and add-court line goes around net-post to the left) and gets in that line. This keeps them moving and gets them hitting off of both sides.

Overhead

Describe this shot as: “a ball that is coming to you higher than your head that you hit out of the air over the net.”

Buzz words: reach for the sky, spike/hit down.

When tossing the balls to practice this shot, it is best (and safest!) for the coach to stand *beside* the player on the same side of the net.

1. First, the coach tosses the ball high over the athlete's head and has them "reach for the sky" and just "touch" the ball with the face their racquet. If you find that they do not extend their arm when "reaching to the sky", try having them reach up high with just their hand (no racquet) to help them feel how far they need to extend their arm.
2. Next, the coach feeds a ball high over the player's head and they try to "hit down"/spike the ball(the guys understand the "s-word" usually better than the gals). It is helpful to set up your target cones diagonally around the service line to hit towards.

Serve

Introduced as "the shot that is used to start a game."

Buzz words: reach for the sky, hit up and out (as opposed to down as in the overhead).

There are two distinctly different skills to be developed in the serve: the toss with the non-dominant hand, and the movement of the racquet. It is not necessary to focus on both in the same clinic session but, no matter how advanced your athletes, it is helpful to review and practice each of these skills using games or relays that make the controlled toss, and the baseball throwing motion of the racquet swing a part of their overall skill-set.

1. Start with athletes lined up facing the fence and have them practice over-hand/baseball throw into the fence. Or you can have them stand at the service line, and try to throw as deep as they can over the net. Emphasize arm up, hand behind ear, and elbow bent. Next, practice arm motion holding racquet. *Make sure athletes are spread out!!!
2. Practice toss with non-dominant hand. Have them stand sideways along a line with non-dominant foot ahead of other foot. Have them try to get their toss higher than their head but not too far from their body. Have them toss and let it bounce. If their toss is wild, it may be helpful to describe the toss motion as "pretend to hold a book on the flat of your hand, start with it below your waist and lift it up to the top shelf". It is

easiest to practice this ball-toss skill, without a ball , or with a foam ball to start.

3. Line up along the service line and have them try tossing and “touching” their tossed ball, with their racquet when it is still over their head.
4. Then have them toss, reach up to the sky, and hit “out and up” over the net. You can start them at the service line initially and then move them back toward the baseline as they improve. **Remember**, the goal is for the athlete to feel successful at their particular ability level.
5. Serving relay: Start with 10 balls in each of 2 baskets. The baskets are placed up near the net (on the same side as the players). One basket on the deuce court near the net and the other on the add-court near the net. Two teams lined up behind the baseline- one on the add side and one team on the deuce side. The first person on each team tries to serve a ball over the net. If they get it over the net, they run up and *take* one ball out of the basket at the net. If they do not get the ball over the net, they go to the back of the line and the next person on the team tries to serve. The team that empties their basket at the net first wins. You can adjust this relay according to athlete ability. You can make it easier by moving the players up to the service line to serve or you can make it more difficult by saying the serve must go to a certain place (i.e. cross court, or into the proper service box) in order to count.

Lob

This is a stroke that is taught to the more advanced athletes as it comes into play once the athlete is learning strategy in playing points. It is introduced as a type of stroke that is most often used when your opponents are close to the net and you want to keep it away from them by getting it over their head. Is a stroke that “lifts to the sky”.

As with the other strokes it is important to get the body/shoulder turn. A good knee bend, and open face of the racquet are important in generating a good lob.

Clinic Wrap-up

Leave a few minutes at the end of your clinic time to:

- pick up balls
- summarize with the group what they did that day
- say something positive about each athlete and congratulate them on what they did well that day.
- encourage them to try to get some exercise during the week; maybe even give them a daily challenge i.e. “Do 10 high knee lifts every day.” Then check with them the following week and congratulate whoever followed through with the challenge.

Sources used in this training manual:

The internet, and specifically YouTube, is a wonderful resource. Search “tennis activities for young children” or “red-ball tennis drills for kids” and see where it takes you. If you are working with the more advanced athletes, look at ways that the tennis professionals teach strokes to novice/beginner players. You may learn a lot that enhances your game as well!! I did!

Manual for Teaching Adaptive Tennis - USTA.com

assets.usta.com/assets/576/15/Manual_for_Teaching_Adaptive_Tennis.pdf

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[Special Pops Tennis – Play Tennis, Make Friends, Live Life](https://www.specialpopstennis.org/)

<https://www.specialpopstennis.org/>

Buzz Words Used in Adaptive Tennis Teaching

Safe Space: Area surrounding the athlete based on extending the racquet at arms-length in all directions.

Hug Your Racquet: When not engaged in a drill, hold the racquet face to your heart. (see photo below)

Shake Hands Grip: Ask athlete, “which hand do you write with?” Demonstrate handshake with the athlete’s dominant hand and then hand him/her the racquet handle to repeat the handshake. (See photo below)

Happy Feet: Used to describe staying on the balls of the feet and moving feet when doing drills and warm-up. (see photo below)

Racquet Has Eyes: Describe the racquet head as a face like yours; then explain that it has eyes that look where the ball is going i.e. “keep the eyes looking where you want the ball to go”. (See photo below)

Eyes on the Ball: Watch the ball hit the racquet. (See photo below)

Ready Position: Position of the body, facing the target, ready to turn either way. Racquet head is above the net, body weight over the balls of the feet. (See photo below)

STOP sign or High Five: Positioning of the racquet for hitting volleys.(See photo below)

Bump or Tap: Movement of the racquet forward in a non-aggressive swing. (See photo below)

Racquet Face In Your Pocket: Positioning of the racquet for a two-handed backhand where they are pretending to pull a racquet out of their non-dominant side pocket (like pulling a sword out of its sheath) and other hand on top of dominant hand.

Kiss Your Shoulder: Describes the position of the racquet as it finishes the ground-stroke over the shoulder.

Open the Door: Describes the movement of turning sideways to the net and getting racquet back. (See photo)

Reach For the Sky: Racquet position on overhead and serve. (See photo)



Hug the racquet



Ready Position



Shake hands grip



Racquet has eyes



Stop sign/High five



Reach for the sky – serve & overhead



Happy feet



Open the door: turning shoulders for forehand and backhand



Eyes on the ball



Eyes on the ball

Final Words to Volunteers

YOU are a very influential person in the lives of these athletes. Your importance and effectiveness is not in your skills as a tennis player, but in your ability to establish a caring, supportive, encouraging relationship with the athletes on your court. This job can be very challenging for the coach since these athletes demonstrate a variety of physical, mental and social limitations. The best advice that can be given to you is: REMEMBER that your main purpose is not to form a more complete TENNIS PLAYER, it is to help form a more complete PERSON who can then be happy running around a tennis court playing with a ball and racquet. Whether you are helping them hit a ball over the net or just picking up balls and putting them back in the ball hopper, always look for opportunities to get a smile, laugh, high five, or maybe just get them to look you in the eyes, and you have been a fantastic and successful Coach that day!!

**THANKS TO EACH OF YOU FOR YOUR
CONTRIBUTION TO THE SPECIAL POPS PROGRAM!!!**