

COACHING TENNIS

Technical and Tactical Skills

Endorsed by

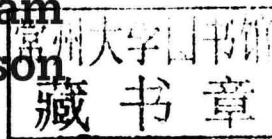


American Sport Education Program

Coaching TENNIS

Technical and Tactical Skills

American Sport
Education Program
with Kirk Anderson



网球技战术技巧指导

Coaching tennis technical and tactical skills.



HUMAN KINETICS

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Coaching tennis technical and tactical skills / American Sport Education Program.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7360-5380-8 (soft cover)

ISBN-10: 0-7360-5380-8 (soft cover)

1. Tennis--Coaching. I. American Sport Education Program.

GV1002.9.C63C63 2009

796.342--dc22

2009002238

ISBN-10: 0-7360-5380-8 (print)

ISBN-13: 978-0-7360-5380-8 (print)

ISBN-10: 0-7360-8607-2 (Adobe PDF)

ISBN-13: 978-0-7360-8607-3 (Adobe PDF)

Copyright © 2009 by Human Kinetics, Inc.

All rights reserved. Except for use in a review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying, and recording, and in any information storage and retrieval system, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

Notice: Permission to reproduce the following material is granted to instructors and agencies who have purchased *Coaching Tennis Technical and Tactical Skills*: pp. 16, 221-223, 224, and 245. The reproduction of other parts of this book is expressly forbidden by the above copyright notice. Persons or agencies who have not purchased *Coaching Tennis Technical and Tactical Skills* may not reproduce any material.

The Web addresses cited in this text were current as of April 2009 unless otherwise noted.

Acquisitions Editor: Pat Sammann; **Project Writers:** United States Tennis Association with Kirk Anderson; **Developmental Editor:** Laura Floch; **Assistant Editors:** Elizabeth Watson and Laura Podeschi; **Copyeditor:** Patsy Fortney; **Proofreader:** Sarah Wiseman; **Indexers:** Robert and Cynthia Swanson; **Permission Manager:** Martha Gullo; **Graphic Designer:** Nancy Rasmus; **Graphic Artist:** Tara Welsch; **Cover Designer:** Keith Blomberg; **Photographer (cover):** Dan Wendt; **Photographer (interior):** Jay Adkins; **Visual Production Assistant:** Joyce Brumfield; **Photo Production Manager:** Jason Allen; **Art Manager:** Kelly Hendren; **Associate Art Manager:** Alan L. Wilborn; **Printer:** McNaughton & Gunn

Copies of this book are available at special discounts for bulk purchase for sales promotions, premiums, fund-raising, or educational use. Special editions or book excerpts can also be created to specifications. For details, contact the Special Sales Manager at Human Kinetics.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper in this book is certified under a sustainable forestry program.

Human Kinetics

Web site: www.HumanKinetics.com

United States: Human Kinetics
P.O. Box 5076
Champaign, IL 61825-5076
800-747-4457
e-mail: humank@hkusa.com

Canada: Human Kinetics
475 Devonshire Road Unit 100
Windsor, ON N8Y 2L5
800-465-7301 (in Canada only)
e-mail: info@hkcanada.com

Europe: Human Kinetics
107 Bradford Road
Stanningley
Leeds LS28 6AT, United Kingdom
+44 (0) 113 255 5665
e-mail: hk@hkeurope.com

Australia: Human Kinetics
57A Price Avenue
Lower Mitcham, South Australia 5062
08 8372 0999
e-mail: info@hkaustralia.com

New Zealand: Human Kinetics
Division of Sports Distributors NZ Ltd.
P.O. Box 300 226 Albany
North Shore City
Auckland
0064 9 448 1207
e-mail: info@humankinetics.co.nz

preface

If you are a seasoned tennis coach, surely you have experienced the frustration of watching your players perform well in practice, only to find them underperforming in matches. In your own playing days, you likely saw the same events unfold. In practice, your teammates, or perhaps even you, could hit the first serve with good pace and spin forcing your opponent wide on the court. You could then move forward to the net and hit the first volley crisply to the opening on the opposite side of the court, but you could not transfer that kind of performance to the match. Although this book will not provide you with a magical quick fix to your players' problems, it will help you prepare your players for match day. Whether you are a veteran coach or are new to coaching, *Coaching Tennis Technical and Tactical Skills* will help you take your players' games to the next level by providing you with the tools you need to teach them the game of tennis.

Every tennis coach knows the importance of technical skills. The ability to hit groundstrokes accurately and with a variety of spins, as well as powerful, directed serves, and win points at the net with decisive volleys and overheads can significantly affect the outcome of a match. This book discusses the basic and intermediate technical skills necessary for your players' success, including offensive, defensive, and neutral skills. You will learn how to detect and correct errors in your players' performances of those skills and then help them transfer the knowledge and ability they gain in practice to matches.

Besides covering technical skills, this book also focuses on tactical skills, including offensive skills such as hitting groundstrokes from the backcourt, approaching the net to hit volleys and overheads, and playing the serve-and-volley style. Your players will learn to identify the style that works best for them and is the most effective against the preferred style of the opponent. The book discusses the tactical triangle, an approach that teaches players to read a situation, acquire the knowledge they need to make a tactical decision, and apply decision-making skills to the problem. To advance this method, the book covers important cues that help athletes respond appropriately when they see a play developing, including important rules, match strategies, and the strengths and weaknesses of opponents.

In addition to presenting rigorous technical and tactical training to prepare your athletes for match situations, this book also provides guidance in how to

improve their match performance by incorporating matchlike situations into daily training. We describe many traditional drills that can be effective but also show you how to shape, focus, and enhance drills and minigames to help players transfer their technical skills to tactical situations that occur during matches. For example, you can change a tedious crosscourt groundstroke drill into an exciting, competitive contest by keeping score of the number of balls that land behind the service line and how many times the opponent has to play the shot from outside the doubles alley.

This book also covers planning at several levels—the season plan, practice plans, and match plans. We offer a set of eight-session practice plans based on the games approach, which cover the length of the practice session, objective of the practice, equipment needed, warm-up, practice of previously taught skills, teaching and practicing new skills, cool-down, and evaluation.

Of course, playing in matches is what your practices eventually lead to. This book shows you how to prepare long before the first match, addressing such issues as communicating with players and parents, scouting your opponents, and motivating your players. You will learn how to control your players' performances on match day by establishing routines, as well as how to help them play at optimal pace, maintain focus between points, and hit every shot with purpose. You will also learn how to manage around such elements as wind, sun, and court surface.

contents

preface **v**

PART I Teaching and Evaluating 1

chapter 1 Teaching Sport Skills **3**

chapter 2 Evaluating Technical and Tactical Skills **9**

PART II Teaching Technical Skills. 19

chapter 3 Foundational Skills **21**

chapter 4 Strokes and Shots **65**

PART III Teaching Tactical Skills 139

chapter 5 Singles and Doubles Tactics **141**

chapter 6 Offensive Tactical Skills **153**

chapter 7 Defensive Tactical Skills **191**

PART IV Planning for Teaching. 217

chapter 8 Season Plans **219**

chapter 9 Practice Plans **229**

PART V Match Coaching 239

chapter 10 Preparing for Matches **241**

chapter 11 During and After the Match **249**

index **253**

about the authors **261**

Teaching and Evaluating

Being a good coach requires more than simply knowing the sport of tennis. You have to go beyond the sport and find a way to teach your athletes how to be better players. To improve your players' performance, you must know how to teach and evaluate them.

In chapter 1 we go over the fundamentals of teaching sport skills. We first provide a general overview of tennis and talk about the importance of being an effective teacher. Next, we define some important skills, helping you gain a better understanding of technical and tactical skills before discussing the traditional and games approaches to coaching.

We build on the knowledge of how to teach sport skills by addressing the evaluation of technical and tactical skills in chapter 2. We discuss the importance of evaluating athletes and review the core skills you should assess and how you can best do so. This chapter stresses the importance of preseason, in-season, and postseason evaluations and provides you with tools you can use to evaluate your players.

By learning how to teach and evaluate your players, you will be better prepared to help them improve their performance.

Teaching Sport Skills

Tennis is a very simple sport. The object is to hit the ball over the net and inside the boundary lines one more time than the opponent does. As simple as that sounds, the task of hitting a ball over a net and into the court has multiple variables that each player must master to be a successful competitor.

The most obvious skills are the strokes used to hit the ball over the net: forehand and backhand groundstrokes, first and second serves, serve returns, volleys, and overhands. Other shots are lobs, approach shots, and drop shots.

In addition, a good tennis player must understand the five controls for each of the preceding strokes: direction, distance, height, spin, and speed. With all of these variables to master, every player must also adjust to an opponent's shots so as to keep the ball away from the opponent.

To get to every ball, players must learn how to move before playing a shot and how to recover after a shot. In addition, they must adjust to their own strengths, the weaknesses of the opponent, their position on the court, and the playing conditions.

Players must also be aware of the mental side of the game. Keeping track of the score; calling balls in and out; controlling their thoughts and emotions; and dealing with errors, conditions, and idiosyncrasies of their opponents are all parts of the game.

Players on a doubles team must do all of the preceding while also working with a partner on the same side of the court. Doubles players need to have all of the skills of singles players while also understanding doubles formations. The team must

do everything possible to return balls to openings on the opponents' side of the court and fill the gaps before the opponents can hit their shot to these openings.

Although tennis is a simple game, there is always something new that players can learn, either tactics or techniques, that will make them better players or teams. The learning and playing take place in almost every country, where players are playing on the same-size court and with identical rules. These rules apply to men and women, children and seniors. Tennis is truly a game for every person, in any country, and it's a game that can be played for a lifetime.

Effective Teaching

Effective tennis coaches must be well schooled in teaching both singles and doubles skills, shot selection, and movement and recovery. Coaches who are tennis players have to learn about all styles of play because players come in all sizes and temperaments. Because they must be able to teach more than one stroke or style of play, coaches must learn much more than the style and strokes they use when they play.

If you, like many coaches, play the game, you must master the transition from playing the game to teaching the game, a more difficult step than most people realize. To perform successfully, athletes need to gain a sense of how each skill feels—how they have to move and think. As a teacher, you have to search for ways to help your players gain that sense, that feeling, of how to perform skills, and you must understand that different athletes often perceive the same skill in different ways.

Additionally, to be an effective teacher, you must accept responsibility for the performance of your athletes. If you hide behind the tired excuse that your athletes just can't play, you will never be motivated to find the teaching strategy that will produce improvement. But if you adopt the credo that the team reflects everything the coach has taught the players, or everything the coach has allowed them to do, then you will understand that every player can improve. Even if an athlete's skill level is average, you can motivate her to hustle and give great effort, you can drill her until she executes perfectly, and you can inspire her to help the whole be greater than the sum of the parts. If you continually search for new ways to teach the same skill, you will eventually find a phrase, drill, or concept that triggers the athlete's reactions in such a way that she finally starts showing improvement in areas where she previously struggled.

You have the responsibility of finding a way to teach, or motivate, your players to improve their skills. This concept alone—your acceptance of responsibility for your players' performances—will produce creative, exciting, and extremely effective teaching, the kind of teaching that results in improved skills and performances by both the individual players and the team as a whole.

Technical and Tactical Skills

As a coach, you are responsible for patiently and systematically explaining and drilling your athletes on the basic skills and shot patterns that make up the game. These skills, called technical skills, are the fundamentals that provide each player with the tools to execute the physical requirements of the game. Each day at

practice, you also must create scenarios on the court in which players have to use their technical skills in matchlike situations, forcing them to make decisions that simulate the choices they will have to make in a match. These skills, called tactical skills, are the bridge between practice performance and match performance. Although the proper execution of technical skills is necessary for success, the tactical skills (i.e., the ability to make the appropriate decisions) are the key to having everything come together when it counts—in the match.

Obviously, other types of skills, such as pure physical capacity, mental skills, communication ability, and character traits, all contribute to athletic performance (Rainer Martens, *Successful Coaching, Third Edition*, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2004, p. 170). Although all these skills are important, effective teaching of the technical and tactical skills provides the foundation for successful tennis coaching.

The variety of skills used in tennis is massive and impossible to chronicle in one text. Consequently, this book focuses on the basic to intermediate technical and tactical skills in tennis. These skills were compiled with the help of the United States Tennis Association. The goal is to provide a resource that will help you improve your understanding and instructional methods as you strive to teach your players the great game of tennis.

Technical Skills

Technical skills are “the specific procedures to move one’s body to perform the task that needs to be accomplished” (Martens, *Successful Coaching*, p. 169). The proper execution of the technical skills of tennis is, obviously, crucial to successful performance. Most coaches, even those with little experience, know what the basic technical skills of tennis are: serves, serve returns, groundstrokes, volleys, approach shots, lobs, and overheads. But your ability to teach athletes how to perform those skills usually develops only over a long period, as you gain coaching experience.

The goal of this book is to speed up the timetable of teaching skills by improving your ability to do the following:

- Clearly communicate the basic elements of each skill to the athlete.
- Construct drills and teaching scenarios to rehearse those skills.
- Detect and correct errors in the athletes’ performance of skills.
- Help athletes transfer knowledge and ability from practice to matches.

Effective coaches have the capacity to transfer their knowledge and understanding of skills into improved performance of those skills by their athletes. This book outlines a plan that will help you do just that by teaching you how to become a master of the basic to intermediate technical skills of tennis and provide your athletes with the resources necessary for success.

Tactical Skills

Mastery of the technical skills of tennis is important, but athletes must also learn the tactics of the game. Tactical skills are defined as “the decisions and actions of players in the contest to gain an advantage over the opposing team or players”

(Martens, *Successful Coaching*, p. 170). Many tennis resources overlook the tactical aspects of the game. Coaches even omit tactical considerations from practice because they are focused so intently on teaching technical skills. Another reason for this omission is that tactics are difficult to teach. One way that you can approach tactical skills is by focusing on the following three critical aspects, the “tactical triangle” (Martens, *Successful Coaching*, p. 215):

- Reading the play or situation
- Acquiring the knowledge needed to make an appropriate tactical decision
- Applying decision-making skills to the problem

This book as a whole provides you with the knowledge you need to teach players how to use the tactical triangle. Part III covers cues that help athletes respond appropriately when they see a play developing, including rules of the game, game strategies, and opponents’ strengths and weaknesses that affect match situations, as well as ways to teach athletes how to acquire and use this knowledge. Part III will also help you teach athletes how to make appropriate choices in given situations and show you how to empower players to recognize emerging situations on their own and make sound judgments.

Perhaps the greatest frustration for a coach is to witness athletes making errors in matches on skills they have repeatedly drilled in practice. For example, in practice a player demonstrates perfect footwork while moving forward to play an approach shot and continues to the net where he hits a controlled and well-placed volley. During a match, however, he rushes his steps and overhits the approach shot and volleys wildly without getting set at the net. Transferring skills from practice to the match can be difficult, but you can reduce errors by placing the athletes in matchlike situations in practice to work on tactical skill decisions. Only after rehearsing the tactical decision repeatedly in practice will the athletes be prepared to execute those decisions (while maintaining their execution of the related technical skills) in the match.

Traditional Versus Games Approach to Coaching

As mentioned, transferring skills from practice to matches can be difficult. A sound background of technical and tactical training prepares athletes for match situations. Incorporating matchlike situations into daily training, however, increases the likelihood that players will transfer skills from practices to matches. To understand how to accomplish this, you must be aware of two approaches to coaching—the traditional approach and the games approach.

Part IV of this book provides examples of both the traditional approach and the games approach to coaching. Although each style has its particular advantages, the concept favored in this book is the games approach. The games approach provides athletes with a competitive situation governed by clear objectives and focused on specific individuals and concepts. The games approach creates a productive and meaningful learning environment in which athletes are motivated by both the structure of the drills and the improvements they make. Finally, the games approach prepares athletes for competition because they have experienced situations that closely resemble the tactical situations they will see in the match.

Traditional Approach

Although the games approach to coaching has much merit, the traditional approach to coaching also has value. The traditional approach often begins with a warm-up period, followed by individual drills, group drills, and then a substantial team period, or scrimmage, at the end of the practice. The traditional approach can be helpful in teaching the technical skills of tennis. But unless you shape, focus, and enhance the team period, the athletes may be unable to transfer the skills they learn in the drills to the scrimmage situation in practice or, worse, into effective performance, especially of tactical skills, in matches.

Games Approach

The games approach emphasizes the use of games and minigames to provide athletes with situations that are as close to a real match as possible (Alan G. Launder, *Play Practice*, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2001). But this method requires more than just putting the players on the court, throwing out a ball, and letting them play. You should use the following three components any time you use the games approach:

1. Shaping
2. Focusing
3. Enhancing

Shaping play allows you to modify the game in a way that is conducive to learning the skills your athletes are working on. You can shape play by modifying the rules, the environment (playing area), the objectives of the game, and the number of players (Launder, p. 56). In scrimmage situations the stronger players often dominate, and the weaker players merely get through the scrimmage without playing a strong, active role. If you shape play by reducing the playing area, every athlete will have the opportunity to learn and practice the skills required for tennis.

You also need to be sure to *focus* the athletes on the specific objectives of the game. Players are more apt to learn, or at least be open to learning, if they know why they are playing the game and how the tactics they are rehearsing fit into the bigger picture. Provide the athletes with clear objectives and a straightforward explanation of how those objectives will help them become better tennis players.

Finally, you must play an active role throughout the game, *enhancing* the play by stopping the game at the teachable moment and instructing the athletes about how they could improve their decision-making or technical skills.

A game called Half-Court Singles is an example of the games approach to teaching tactical skills. This game involves two singles players playing points using only half the singles court. The regular singles court is divided down the middle so the center service line is extended to the baseline, making the court 78 feet long but only 13.5 feet wide. This narrow court forces the players to use short and deep shots to move their opponents and create openings. The objective of the game is to move the opponent very deep in the court so the player can hit a short ball by using a drop shot or drop volley in front of her, or to draw her opponent to the net so she can hit a lob over her head into the backcourt. Because the court is narrow, hitting the ball with angles will be ineffective, so players will need to think about and work short and deep ball sequences.

To play this game, have players play to 10 points. Each player serves 2 points before changing serves. To emphasize the deep and short openings, players are awarded 2 points for hitting a successful drop shot or drop volley (a shot that bounces on the court twice before the opponent can play the shot). Also, award 2 points for a successful lob that the player at the net cannot touch.

This game forces all players to think about keeping the ball in play and not giving the opponent free points with unforced errors. It also makes players think about how to win points by hitting a series of shots rather than a one-shot winner. In this situation players are forced to use a combination of short and deep shots to win points. This is a great learning situation for all players because it makes them think about hitting every shot with a purpose.

The game seems simple, but some fascinating scenarios invariably unfold, creating vivid opportunities for teaching. For example, if a player has an opening shot in the court but hits a poor drop shot, it gives the opponent time to move forward, play the shot, and take an offensive position at the net. Players will learn that they must create an opening by forcing the opponent behind the baseline, but they must be inside the baseline themselves to execute a successful drop shot. This scenario illustrates some intriguing dimensions of the games approach to coaching. Later sections of the text will offer more examples of this approach for you to use in creating great learning experiences for your athletes.

Coaching tennis is a complex yet rewarding job. Tennis coaches are responsible not only for the development of good players but also for the development of young people who know right from wrong and how to make good behavioral decisions. The emphasis of this book is on the concepts and strategies of teaching the basic to intermediate technical and tactical skills of tennis, using both the traditional and games approaches. The foundation of effective teaching that this book provides will help you master the art of helping your athletes refine and improve the array of skills and techniques that make up the diverse, complex, and fascinating game of tennis.

Evaluating Technical and Tactical Skills

Tennis is both an individual sport and a team sport. In building your team, you should use specific evaluation tools to assess the development of the individual parts that make up the whole of the team. You must remember that basic physical skills contribute to the performance of the technical and tactical skills. In addition, an array of nonphysical skills, such as mental capacity, communication skills, and character skills, overlay athletic performance and affect its development (Rainer Martens, *Successful Coaching, Third Edition*). In this chapter we examine evaluation guidelines, exploring the specific skills you should evaluate and the tools to use to accomplish those evaluations. Evaluations as described in this chapter will help you critique your players objectively, something that you should continually strive to do.

Guidelines for Evaluation

Regardless of the skill you are measuring and the evaluation tool you are using, you should observe the basic guidelines that govern the testing and evaluation process. First, the athletes need to know and understand the purpose of the test and its relationship to the sport. If you are evaluating a technical skill, the

correlation should be easy. But when you are evaluating physical skills, or mental, communication, or character skills, you must explain the correlation between the skill and the aspect of the game that will benefit.

Second, you must motivate your athletes to improve. Understanding the correlation to the game will help, but sometimes the matches seem a long way away during practices and training. In the physical skills area, elevating the status of the testing process can help inspire the athletes. If you can create a match-day atmosphere with many players present and watching as you conduct the testing, the athletes will compete with more energy and enthusiasm than they would if you ran the tests in a more clinical fashion. Goal boards and record boards posting all-time best performances can also motivate the athletes. The best of these boards have several categories, including the longest rally from baseline to baseline, the longest rally from the baseline to the net, the longest rally at the net from volley to volley, and target hits with the serve. You could also include tournament results as a team or even individual results or rankings for those playing in sanctioned tournaments.

The best motivation, though, comes from a personal best effort in physical skills testing, or an improved score in technical, tactical, communication, or mental skills. When athletes compare their performances today to those of yesterday, they can always succeed and make progress, regardless of the achievements of their teammates. When they see themselves making progress, they will be motivated to continue to practice and train. This concept, while focusing on the individual, is not antithetical to the team concept. You simply need to remind the team that if every player gets better every day, the team will get better every day!

Third, all testing must be unbiased, formal, and consistent. Athletes will easily recognize flaws in the testing process and subsequently lose confidence in the results. You must be systematic and accurate, treating every athlete the same way, in order for the test to have any integrity. No athlete should be credited with a test result on a physical skill if she does not execute the test regimen perfectly. You must mandate good form and attention to the details of the test. The same is true of evaluation tools that do not measure quantitatively. A coach who wants to evaluate technical skills must use the same tool for all athletes and score them fairly and consistently for them to trust the conclusions reached.

Fourth, you must convey your feedback to the athletes professionally and, if possible, personally. No athlete wants to fail, and all are self-conscious to a certain extent when they don't perform to their expectations or the expectations of their coach. At the same time, all athletes have areas in which they need to improve, and you must communicate those needs to them, especially if they do not see or understand that they need to improve! Personal, private meetings with athletes are crucial to the exchange of this information. Factual results, comparative ranking charts, historical records of previous test results, and even videos of athletes' performances can discretely communicate both areas in which they are doing well and areas in which they need to make progress.

If you have a large number of athletes, you can accomplish these individual meetings in occasional and subtle ways—by asking the athlete to stay for a few minutes in the office after a team meeting, by finding the athlete after practice or a workout in the locker room, by going out to practice early and creating an opportunity to talk to the athlete individually, or by calling the athlete in to the office at random times just to talk. These in-person, one-on-one meetings are by far the best method of communicating to your athletes the areas in which they need to improve.

Finally, you must apply the principles that you are asking of your players to the process of evaluating them. You must be an expert in your field in terms of your knowledge of the technical and tactical skills for your sport, so that you can accurately and consistently evaluate the skill that you see your players perform. You must understand the value and importance of the physical skills (perhaps even in your personal lifestyle and health habits) to convey the importance of these skills to the game. You must have outstanding communication skills to be effective in your teaching, and you must exhibit those skills in your dealings with other staff members, especially when you are visible to the players, so that you can establish credibility with the players regarding communication.

Evaluating Skills

Clearly, players must know the technical skills demanded by their sport, and they must know how to apply those skills in tactical situations when they compete. You must remember, however, that basic physical skills contribute to the performance of the technical and tactical skills and must be consciously incorporated into the athlete's training plan. In addition, various nonphysical skills such as mental capacity, communication skills, and character skills also overlay athletic performance and affect its development.

As you evaluate your athletes, one concept is crucial: Athletes should focus on trying to improve their own previous performance, as opposed to comparing their performances to those of their teammates. Certainly, comparative data help athletes see where they rank on the team and perhaps among other players, and these data may motivate them or help them set goals. However, because all rankings place some athletes on the team below others, these athletes can easily become discouraged, especially if they consistently rank at the bottom of the team. Conversely, if the focus of the evaluation is personal improvement, every player on the team has the possibility of being successful every time tests are conducted. Whether you are looking at physical skills or nonphysical skills, encourage your athletes to achieve their own personal bests.

Evaluating Physical Skills

The essential physical skills for tennis are strength, speed, agility, power, and flexibility. The training and evaluation of those five physical skills are especially important in the off-season and preseason periods, when athletes are concentrating on overall improvement. In-season evaluation, however, also ensures that any off-season gains, especially in strength, do not deteriorate because the players and coaches are devoting much of their time and attention to match-plan preparation and practice.

Testing should occur at least three times a year—once immediately before the tennis season begins to gauge athletes' readiness for the season, once after the season to measure the retention of physical skills during competition, and once in the spring to evaluate athletes' progress and development in the off-season program. In addition, you will be constantly evaluating your athletes throughout the season to make slight adjustments, about which you will learn more in chapter 8.

Of course, training programs can positively affect several skills. For example, improvements in leg strength and flexibility will almost certainly improve speed.