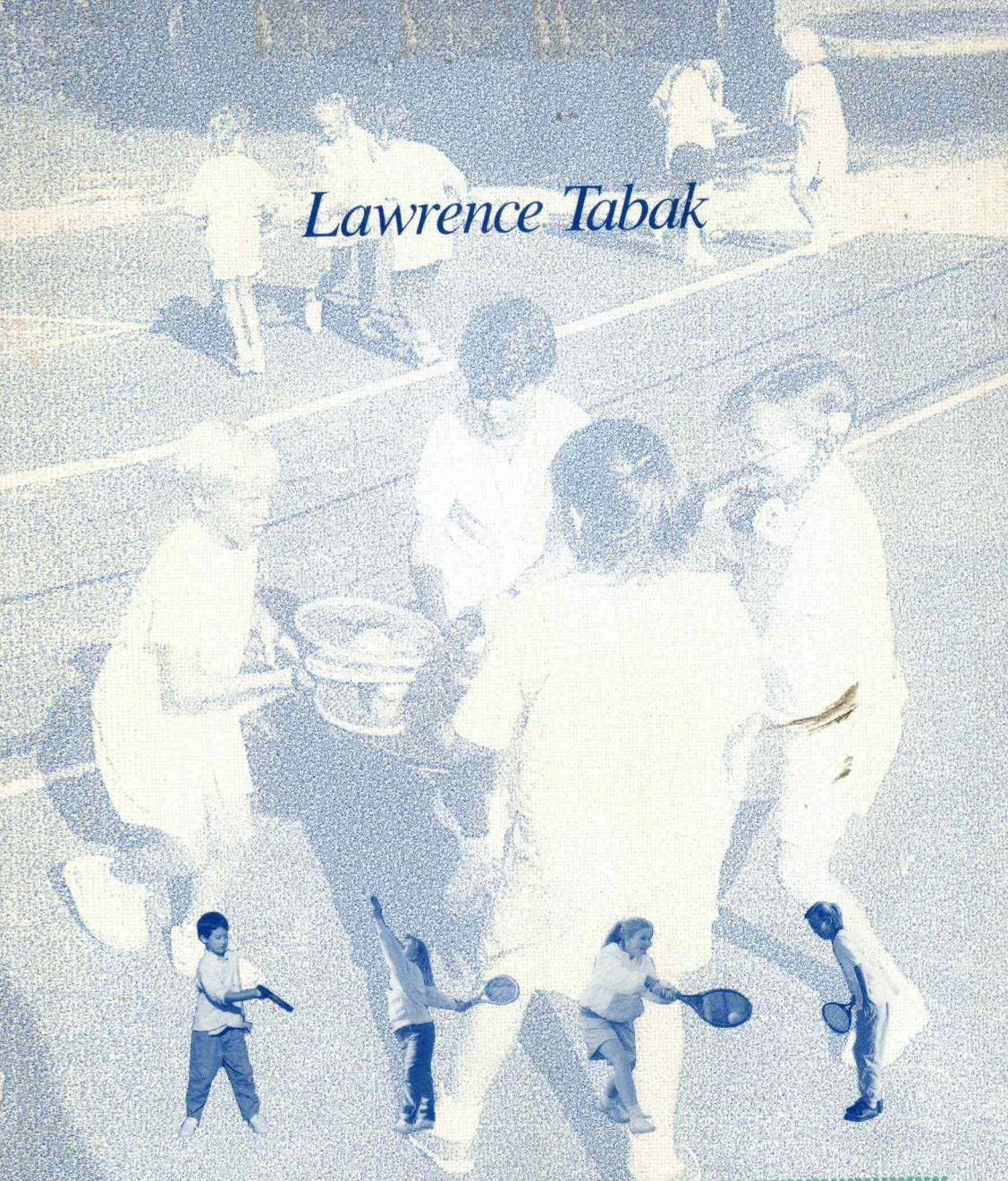
Lawrence Tabak



Teaching Tennis the USTA Way

TEACHING TENNIS— THE USTA WAY

A Teacher's Guide to Tennis in the Schools

Lawrence Tabak

United States Tennis Association

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PREFACE

THE NEW BOOM IN TENNIS IN THE SCHOOLS

Tennis is not a novelty in our nation's schools. In fact, many of the millions of adults who play tennis regularly received their introduction to tennis in school. But for the most part, tennis has been the domain of the high school and college physical education class, often reaching first-time players when they are between the ages of 16 and 20.

Yet tennis experts agree that tennis should ideally be introduced at a much earlier age. Physical educators agree as well. Lifetime sports should be an integral part of the physical education experience in upper elementary school, middle school and junior high school. But when it comes to tennis, there are several obvious barriers. The most commonly cited are:

- No tennis courts
- No rackets or balls
- Large classes of 30 or more students per teacher
- Teachers who don't play tennis and/or have a limited knowledge of the game

At first glance these barriers look daunting. But answers have been developed and are available. Today millions of students in grade schools, middle schools, and junior highs are receiving successful introductions to tennis. In every state of the union, children in small schools, large schools, rural areas, and our largest cities are finding that tennis can be a real sports option for them.

In the delivery of this message, the United States Tennis Association (USTA) has made a major commitment through its USTA Schools Program. The USTA is the official governing body of the sport of tennis and is best known for its U.S. Open, Davis Cup and Federation Cup teams, and United States Olympic team. Each year the USTA takes revenues from these events and devotes well over $1 million a year to helping schools introduce tennis to their 4th–8th grades. This is accomplished through teacher training and the free distribution of the USTA Schools Program Curriculum, equipment grants, and the development of community support systems. A major facet of the USTA Schools Program is ensuring that there are opportunities for children to pursue tennis outside of school in a free or low-cost public program.

One of the keys to the successful introduction of tennis in schools is a workable lesson plan that is realistic regarding equipment, facilities, and class size. In 1983 the USTA began to pioneer a curriculum that could meet these challenges. The initial curriculum document was a result of a cooperative venture among the professional staff of the USTA, the New York City Board of Education, and the sponsor of the largest public tennis program in the country, the New York Junior Tennis League. After extensive field testing and a number of major revisions, the result is the USTA Schools Program Curriculum, an approach to teaching tennis adopted by over 1,000 school systems across the country.

Teaching Tennis the USTA Way takes advantage of this proven curriculum and builds upon the practical lesson plans to explain the basics and theory of teaching tennis. These basic principles can be applied in any teaching environment, from elementary school classes to college physical education classes to country club private lessons.

But the primary audience for this publication is the thousands of teachers and teachers-in-training who will take on the endlessly challenging task of teaching physical skills to large groups, and who will, for a few weeks a year, give millions of children their first exposure to the game of tennis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One of the benefits of reviewing the relatively short history of tennis writing is recognizing that much of what is promoted as innovation is really nothing new at all. Much of the information and material in any book on tennis has untraceable antecedents and numerous inventors. For all of this work, and all of the unacknowledgeable contributors, my thanks and admiration.

For the overall movement into group teaching, and for establishing a sophisticated approach to teaching groups, credit is due to Eve Kraft, the founder of the USTA Princeton Office and, prior to that, the national-model Princeton Community Tennis Program. The author holds a lifetime debt to former University of Iowa Coach Don Klotz for his ever-clear perceptions (many of which find a place in this book), and his undying enthusiasm for tennis.

The original version of the USTA Curriculum was developed with the cooperation of the New York Board of Education and the New York Junior Tennis League. Among the many people who helped in this work were Lillian Vitaglione, who served as the Coordinator, Curriculum Committee for the New York Board of Education; Gordon Kent, representing the New York Junior Tennis League; and Lew Brewer from the USTA. Many of the teaching techniques and progressions owe a direct debt to Dennis Van der Meer and his Standard Teaching Method.

The lesson plans and much of the collateral material benefit from the close reading and comments from the USTA's sectionally-based Directors of the USTA Schools Program. For their invaluable experience and suggestions—and more importantly, camaraderie and inspiration—recognition is due to Martha Albelo, Lindsey Berman, Mark Bosely, Laura Canfield, Carrie Cimino, Pat Colbert, Brian Cunniff, Jean Dillingham, Marshall Graham, Randy Kop, Darryl Lewis, Diane Makonnen, Maria MacDonald, Nancy Osborne, John Sheffield, Betsy Thurmond, Chris Vodegel, and David Wahlgren. Intermediate lesson plans and numerous details reflect the direct hand of USTA Staffer Randy Hester. Further improvements in the lesson plans were suggested by USTA national staff members Sean Sloane, Maggie Lawliss, Beth Brainard, and Gerry McGuffin.

Invaluable readings of the total manuscript were provided by the USTA's Director of Player Development Ron Woods and the Florida Tennis Association's Director of the USTA Schools Program, Barbara Braunstein. The final version has been improved immeasurably by their suggestions.

I would like to express my appreciation to the USTA for providing the opportunity to fulfill the dream of having a part in spreading the word about the great game of tennis to millions of children across the country. The USTA Schools Program forms the backdrop for this entire text. To the USTA also, my deepest thanks for allowing the materials developed under its auspices to be included as a substantive part of this book, and for generally supporting this project. And finally, to my wife Diane, for carving out of an impossibly busy family schedule the hours needed to create this book.

INTRODUCTION

WHY TENNIS?

FITNESS

Americans see themselves as an active, physically fit population, and there's plenty of reinforcement for that impression. Television commercials and shows highlight healthy, thin people with active lifestyles. Fitness clubs are proliferating. Home fitness equipment is a billion-dollar industry. Workout videos and fitness books are best sellers.

But the facts do not support this impression. In 1987, a University of Michigan study demonstrated that 49% of Americans exercise once or less a year.[1] That's one-half of our population leading virtually sedentary lives.

The President's Council on Physical Fitness reports equally disturbing news on youth fitness. The standards have been slipping, and continue to slip.[2]

Yet the message to stay active, to stay fit, is heard everywhere. Even such an unlikely source as a time-management book, Ed Bliss's *Getting Things Done,* takes time to implore, "If you are too busy to exercise, you are too busy. In your hierarchy of values, nothing can have higher priority than health, and if you find time for watching television but not for tennis or golf or jogging, you are violating the most basic rule of time management, which is to do the most important things first."[3]

Since the late 1960s, there has been a strong movement within physical education to build skills that can contribute to lifetime, as well as immediate, physical fitness. But even as tennis reaped the benefits from this effort, numerous authorities began to steer exercisers away from tennis into what became known as aerobic activities.

In 1984, Brian Sharkey wrote in *Physiology of Fitness* that "no serious student of fitness or sports considers (racquet sports) adequate for aerobic fitness training. They don't allow you to maintain your heart rate in the training zone."[4]

Kenneth Cooper, acknowledged as the father of the aerobics movement, writes that, "It is difficult to use tennis exclusively in an aerobic program because it takes too many hours per week."[5]

As such advice was becoming dogma in the literature of exercise, a cardiologist in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Dr. Barry Ramo, attempted to rate the fitness levels of a group of middle-aged men who used tennis singles as their primary mode of exercise. He explains that he initiated the study with the expectation that the start-and-stop stress of tennis might put undue strains on the hearts of older players. Instead, he was surprised to find that his subjects were quite fit—comparable to dedicated runners of the same age.[6]

Over the same years, a biologist in Little Rock, Arkansas, was busily wiring recording instruments to the chests of racquetball and tennis players. In 1986, a resulting study indicated that middle-aged club players, playing tennis singles, raised their heart rates and maintained that level of exertion at a pace that met the standards not only for maintaining cardiovascular fitness but for establishing it as well.[7]

It's true that the tennis players had to spend more time at their game than the joggers did running to achieve comparable levels of fitness. It's also true that for many people, the choice between playing an entertaining, social, and competitive game of tennis and going for a run may be a choice between good exercise and none.

The results of these recent studies add strength to the premise behind the teaching of lifetime sports. Teaching tennis skills to children can be a powerful way to help give them the tools for a longer, more productive, healthier life.

THE NEED TO PLAY

Impressive philosophical books have been written about play. What is it? Why do we see play as a universal behavior in all cultures?

In *Leisure and Human Behavior,* Gene Bammel and Lei Lane Burrus-Bammel outline six characteristics of play:[8]

1. Intrinsically rewarding
2. Voluntary
3. Pleasurable
4. Absorbing
5. A means of self-expression
6. Has a quality of make-believe or escape

It's easy to see that tennis as a game has the ability to satisfy all of these characteristics. Although people cite exercise and friendship as the most common reasons for playing, it's equally clear that people get "hooked" on the game and find intrinsic rewards in playing. It's clearly voluntary, absorbing, and even with the inevitable frustrations, pleasurable. The game allows each player to demonstrate personality and individuality through style and tactics, and entering the boundaries of a court is indeed to enter a play world, where all is neat and orderly—a perfect escape from the chaos of everyday life.

The explanation of the drive to play is even more complicated than describing play. Rather than tread this difficult terrain, I will turn to one of the primary sources of the philosophy of play, Danish historian and philosopher Johan Huizinga, who actually had something specific to say about tennis in *Homo Ludens*.

"The arena, the card-table, the tennis court, are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed . . . within which an absolute and peculiar order reigns. . . . Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life [play] brings a temporary, a limited perfection. . . . Play casts a spell over us; it is 'enchanting,' 'captivating.' It is invested with the noblest qualities we are capable of perceiving in things: rhythm and harmony."[9]

TENNIS AND ACADEMICS

When the USTA began to develop a tennis curriculum, the project was undertaken jointly with the New York City Board of Education. In 1984, the New York City Board of Education's Division of Curriculum and Instruction outlined some of the opportunities tennis provided to "develop both cognitive and affective skills."

1. *Mathematics skills.* Keeping score in tennis involves a fairly sophisticated ability to substitute symbols ("love," "15," and "30") for numbers (0, 1, and 2). Students are encouraged to use counting skills as well as percentages (e.g., 6 out of 10 = 60%). Geometric terms such as angles and lines are frequently used while playing a tennis game.
2. *Communication skills.* The USTA Curriculum consistently makes demands on students to explain a concept as well as perform it. For example, students have to justify why proceeding to the net during a game is good tennis strategy.
3. *Social skills.* Students will be able to obtain the social benefits that are involved with tennis. Tennis demands regular and consistent cooperation. It is a game that is not only played in virtually every part of the country, but in every part of the world. It is played everywhere by exactly the same rules. Students who obtain a "fluency" in tennis will find it a recreational activity par excellence, affording constant interaction with players, partners, and opponents alike.

4. *Emotional development.* Tennis is a great game for promoting emotional development. Tennis players must, by the nature of the game, be self-reliant. They cannot call a time-out to consult a coach or expect to get a substitute when things get rough. Players must also be their own officials. This demands a very high level of trust and cooperation. Tennis offers the best of the benefits of the individual sport, yet is regularly played with a partner. Tennis is also one of the few games with regular competition between men and women and boys and girls. Mixed doubles is a major event, even at the international level. By providing such a variety of competitive situations in an atmosphere of independence and self-reliance, teachers help participants learn to deal with the wide range of emotions inevitable in play and competition.
5. *Thinking skills.* In addition to providing physical exercise, tennis has also been recognized as a game that helps develop thinking skills, such as ball-placement strategies for forcing an opponent out of position and anticipating an opponent's move. Successful tennis players must learn how to concentrate over a long period of time, and they must eventually learn how effort and concentrated purpose are necessary in practice in order to achieve maximum skill development.
6. *Recreational benefits.* It should be stressed that tennis players at every level play for the sheer pleasure of the game. Players need not be of any great ability to find excitement and enjoyment when playing against equal opponents. Tennis combines a contest of physical and mental skills that can be satisfying at every level of play. As a result, players often remark that tennis allows them to "get away" from their everyday problems, and provides relaxation, even if it is physically taxing.

TEACHING TENNIS TO GROUPS— A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Tennis has spawned a library of books and periodicals. A 1980 bibliography identified 442 tennis books.[10] Quite a few of these are instructional in nature, but almost all of these are focused on the individual and individual skills. *Tennis My Way, Play Better Tennis, Mastering Your Tennis Strokes,* and *Tips for Better Tennis* give just a flavor of the hundreds of books written for an audience of millions of recreational and aspiring competitive players.

Although the idea of teaching tennis to groups has been around for some time, it did not become a standard part of the game in the United States until fairly recently. Because tennis has been traditionally taught by professionals giving private and semiprivate lessons, and because the audience for publications on group teaching has been small, the literature on group teaching is relatively sparse.

A mere handful of books on teaching tennis to groups was published prior to 1960. As the lifetime sports movement took hold, there was a commensurate growth in publications. Some books, such as the 1961 *Golf, Swimming, and Tennis,* were clearly lifetime sports-specific. However well-meaning in concept, publications such as these did little to help the teacher. The information provided by the author, a former tennis champion, focused on the history of tennis, some fundamentals of play and stroking, and relatively advanced strategy. There is basically nothing on how to translate this information to a group of students.[11]

In 1963, recognizing the lack of good literature, the USTA joined forces with American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (presently called AAHPERD), and published *Tennis Group Instruction.* This book really follows the traditional methods for teaching individuals and adapts them for larger groups. Its strength is its recognition for specific advice on class management. Its weakness is that it is stroke- and technique-heavy and light in practical applications for the teacher.[12]

Many of the texts that followed suffer from the attempt to reach a broader audience of tennis coaches, players, and group instructors. Although they often have extensive advice on stroke production, they do not provide the physical education teacher with the range of activities and approaches that seem necessary to keep a class active and productive. Other publications that focus on group instruction are geared more for summer tennis programs than school programming. While some of the advice in publications like *The Tennis Teacher's Guide* is valuable, much of the text, such as "Promoting a Group Program" or "Where to Obtain Teaching Personnel," is not geared to a school situation. As in many other publications, its "Group Formations" and "Group Games" are all described and pictured on tennis courts, which are not likely to be available to many physical education teachers.[13]

Teaching Tennis the USTA Way is the result of the steady growth in school tennis and the need for a methodology that speaks directly to the needs of the thousands of physical educators who are interested in teaching the lifetime skills of tennis.

NOTES

1. Physician and Sports Medicine, Vol. 15, No. 4, April, 1987, p. 118–132.
2. President's Council on Physical Fitness, "1985 School Population Fitness Survey," Washington, D.C.
3. Edwin C. Bliss, *Getting Things Done,* (New York; Bantam Books, 1987), p. 53.
4. Brian Sharkey, *Physiology of Fitness,* 2nd ed. (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1984), p. 41.
5. Kenneth Cooper, *The Aerobics Program for Total Well-Being,* (New York: M. Evans and Company, Inc., 1982), p. 131.

6. Daniel Friedman, Barry W. Ramo, and Glenn J. Gray, "Tennis and Cardiovascular Fitness in Middle-Aged Men," *The Physician and Sportsmedicine,* Vol. 12, No. 7, July, 1984, pp. 87–92.
7. Leland F. Morgans, et al., "Heart Rate Responses During Singles and Doubles Tennis Competition," *The Physician and Sportsmedicine,* Vol. 15, No. 7, July, 1987, pp. 67–74.
8. Gene Bammel and Lei Lane Burrus-Bammel, *Leisure and Human Behavior,* (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1982), p. 41–42.
9. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens,* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949).
10. David Peele, *Racket and Paddle Games,* (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1980).
11. Otis Dypwick, Einar Olsen, and Helen Hull Jacobs, *Golf, Swimming, and Tennis,* (Mankato, Minnesota: Creative Educational Society, 1961).
12. AAHPER, *Tennis Group Instruction,* (Washington, D.C., 1963).
13. Eve Kraft and John Conroy, *The Tennis Teacher's Guide,* (New York: Scholastic Coach Athletic Services, 1969).

SPORTSTAR—TEACHING SPORTSMANSHIP ALONG WITH SKILLS

WHAT IS SPORTSMANSHIP?

Many of us have been in a position to award a sportsmanship trophy, and we all regularly assess athletes as good or poor sports. But what are we judging?

The first thing that comes to most people's minds is outward behavior. But with further reflection, it soon becomes obvious that sportsmanship is much more than this. A player could exhibit wonderful behavior but think nothing of cheating if the occasion should arise. Another player may appear controlled during the contest but afterward gloat over victories and have only excuses upon losing.

Sportsmanship is an internalized attitude that reflects itself in a wide range of actions on and off the court. Good sports have a healthy attitude about competition. They have respect for their opponents and themselves. They tend to remain under emotional control even in adverse situations. As a result, they are often among the steadiest and most reliable competitors at every level of sport.

CAN SPORTSMANSHIP BE LEARNED?

Teachers and coaches have a tremendous impact on sportsmanship. David Krauss writes in *Peak Performance* that "whether you pay attention to them or not, emotional states and mental attitudes are being learned and taught in practice, just as surely as are the physical skills. . . ."[1] In *Physical Education and Sport in a Changing Society,* William Freeman observes that "as physical educators and coaches we teach ethics and values largely by example."[2]

By incorporating practical tips and suggestions in every lesson plan and by exhibiting sportsmanlike behavior at all times, the physical educator can positively impact a student's lifetime attitude toward competition.

THE USTA'S SPORTMANSHIP PROGRAM

Teachers and coaches often introduce the concepts of sportsmanship only when students are on the verge of stepping into their first competitive match or game. Most serious observers of youth sports will readily agree that if this is the case, it's too late.

Part of the methodology encouraged by the USTA is an attention to sportsmanship in the earliest stages of learning the sport. The program that presents a practical approach to incorporating sportsmanship into lesson programs is called SPORTSTAR. The heart of the program is a manual called *Guide to Teaching Sportsmanship.* The USTA's SPORTSTAR kit also includes the rules of tennis, tests on the rules of tennis, the code of conduct ("unwritten" rules of tennis), and badges and certificates.

Each USTA lesson plan will contain one or two SPORTSTAR tips that are excerpted from the *USTA Guide to Teaching Sportsmanship.* This guide can be ordered from USTA Publication, 707 Alexander Road, Princeton, New Jersey.

NOTES

1. David P. Krauss, *Peak Performance,* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1980), p. 81.
2. Wiliam H. Freeman, *Physical Education and Sport in a Changing Society,* 2nd ed., (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1982), p. 151.

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