



COACH to COACH

Produced by Wayne Elderton, a Tennis Canada National Level 4 Coach, Head of Tennis Canada Coaching Development and Certification in BC, and Tennis Director of the Grant Connell Tennis Centre in North Vancouver.
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Dynamics of Drilling: Drilling S.M.A.R.T.

Hitting a million balls is great. However, "practice makes permanent"! Incorrect practice makes one good at the wrong skills. To ensure quality, *correct performance* is the goal when practicing.

INCREASING the QUALITY of REPETITION

It has been said that drills are the 'life blood' of any lesson. Good drills enhance learning by increasing the volume of quality repetitions of a skill, not to mention increase activity and fun!

A player could learn a skill by trial and error during play. To dramatically shortcut that learning process, a good Coach sets up drills for extra practice on that skill. Months worth of playing can be simulated by the repetition in a single drill.

The challenge for any Coach is the balance between *quality* and *quantity* of repetition. **A quality repetition is where both player and coach know what correct performance looked, sounded, and most importantly, felt like.** *Practice makes permanent!* Many repetitions of poor quality in practice only help a player ingrain poor performance. Correct performance with low repetition is no better since the learning process wouldn't be any shorter than if the player were to play on their own.

It is important for a coach to meet the challenge of quality repetition. **The primary goal for setting up any drill is to increase quality repetition!** Hitting a million balls doesn't help unless it becomes, hitting a million quality balls.

To balance quantity and quality, set up the drill for maximum repetition then apply the S.M.A.R.T. principles to maintain good quality (Adapted from the LTA 1990).

SPECIFIC

Player's learn best by processing and mastering only one skill at a time. The more a coach zeros in on a single skill to work on, the quicker the student can achieve success. For example, when working on a deep crosscourt groundstroke, a drill on mastering racquet angle at impact to improve direction, would be specific. That could be followed by a drill on low to high swing path for net clearance, etc. In this way, all the skills required could be learned systematically. This process would maximize the players's learning more than hoping a general crosscourt groundstroke drill would get it all done.

MEASURABLE

One of the most important elements of any drill is **highlighting correct performance**. If the coach is the only judge of correctness, how can a player practice on their own? By setting up a **measurement**, the coach equips the player to judge correct performance for themselves. For example, to measure a low to high swing, a player can get a point if the racquet starts below the impact and finishes above the shoulders, etc. A measurement also makes it easier for the coach to target positive reinforcement. It also helps the player gauge success and focus on the process.

AGREED

For a player to commit to learning, they must believe in what the coach is 'selling'. A coach can get a player to do most anything during a lesson. Whether the skills transfer to live play is the more important question. Coaches need to build agreement before proceeding into a drill. Giving emotional and rational reasons why the skill will help, and demonstrating how it works in a live game situation, is crucial.

REALISTIC

Players will commit to learning more often if they see how the skill will help them in a real game situation. One of the most common reasons why players don't like a drill is because they believe, "it isn't real". Even very basic skills (like self-rally drills) should be tied back to live play.

TIMED

A player's intensity is important to control. The more the drill is similar to real play, the more the skill will transfer to real play. Players need to know how long they are expected to work. For example, "You are going to receive balls from corner to corner, your turn will be 4 balls (or 3 successful attempts, etc)."

S.M.A.R.T drills will help students learn faster, make it more rewarding for the coach, and be more fun for both.

If you would like to ask a question, give feedback, or want more information, contact us at:
www.acecoach.com