



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.
© 2003 Wayne Elderton

Dynamics of Drilling: Increasing Repetition Quantity

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 increasing activity and fun!

MAXIMIZING REPETITION

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 practise on that skill. Months worth of playing can be simulated by the repetition in a single drill.

This article looks at the challenge of maximum repetition. The need for *quantity* of repetition is critical for learning and training tennis (or any skill). **The primary goal for setting up any drill is to increase quality repetition!** This seems obvious, but all too often, coaches set-up drills that violate that principle. For example, it is common tennis drilling practice to set up players in a single file line of 3-8 players.

Single file lines are one of the biggest killers of repetition quantity (and activity) in training sessions. This is the choice of many Coaches because it allows them to control the activity. However, a line of three or more players means hitting only 1/3 of the time or less.

This doesn't seem bad until one realizes that **it takes 120-180 repetitions to build a general motor program.** In other words, if a player doesn't get approximately 150 repetitions on the skill being learned, they won't have it ingrained enough to go practise it on their own. With an organized set-up, the Coach can, 'get the reps in'. It is by no means easy since, to get 150 reps per player in a class of 4, requires hitting 600 balls! Most classes are only 1-1.5 hours long and coaches usually don't spend more than 10 minutes on any one drill.

It isn't required that all 150 reps are completed in one class, but the faster this is done, the faster the player will progress.

To get that many reps in one hour with 4 or more players, **a drills must allow each player to hit 8-12 balls per minute.** If the class size increases, the challenge for the Coach becomes impossible to overcome with a single file line. A Coach can increase repetition by working with the following Quantity Elements:

Quantity Elements

A Coach can increase repetition by including as many of the following Quantity Elements as possible:

OF HITTERS:

By increasing the amount of players hitting the ball (3 lines of 2 rather than one line of 6), more repetition per person is achieved.

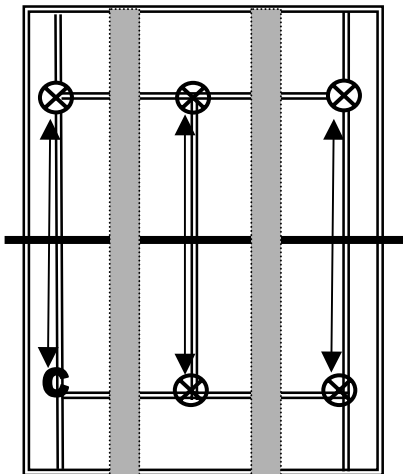
OF FEEDERS:

By teaching players to feed each other, more repetition is available. Of course they cannot do it at first, that is why the skill needs to be taught! The biggest advantage of this approach is that players learn skills that allow them to practise on their own. Coaches will often fall into the trap of thinking, "they are not good enough to feed themselves, that's why I have to feed". This false thinking dooms students to be dependent on the coach for practise. In addition, "Live ball drills" (where players exchange the ball with each other) dramatically increase the number of repetitions. For developing groundstrokes rally skills, Live ball drills are by far the most effective approach.

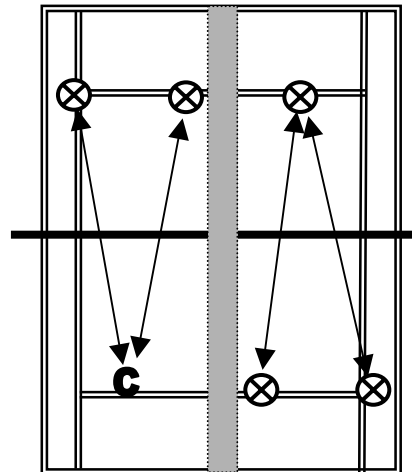
FORMATIONS:

How players are set-up can increase the number of repetitions. Two common formations a coach can use when players hit to each other are "Lane" and "Triangle". These formations are shown with players at the serviceline, but they can be used baseline to baseline as well. The coach should use markers to set up 'safety zones' between the players (shaded area)

"Lane" formation'



'Triangle formation'.



OF ATTEMPTS /TURN:

Coaches should avoid the, 'merry-go-round' system of hit one ball and go to the back of the line. For maximum learning, the set-up should allow students to get 4-8 reps per turn minimum. Having more reps per turn also means more time is spent on hitting than moving into and out of lines.

ROTATION:

By setting up an organized rotation system, every player will get equal opportunity. After the initial demonstration & explanation of the rotation, all the Coach needs to do is say, "Rotate"! This smoothes out the time between turns.

Drills that maximize repetition will help players learn faster, be 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