



# COACH to COACH

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## PROGRESSIVE TENNIS: Technical/tactical Development Advantages

Progressive Tennis is a system of scale appropriate development for 5-9 year olds. It is a system that promotes competitive play for younger players and speeds development.

In this article we will explore some of the advantages the Progressive tennis system provides for developing techniques as well as tactics.

Here is a quick summary of just some of the technical elements that are easier to develop using a scaled approach (modified racquets, court size and balls):

### Groundstrokes

- **Racquet Rhythm:** Players can increase racquet acceleration through the impact zone, which helps many advanced actions. In contrast, when children use adult equipment, it encourages deceleration and more 'blocking' actions.
- **Grip:** Using the scaled equipment makes it easier to develop "eastern" grips (minimizing the full "western" grips that regular balls and courts entice players to use).
- **Swing Path:** Players can develop leveling and attacking actions easier as well as control various trajectories (high, medium and low arcs). Regulation balls promote higher arcs and extreme low-to-high actions.
- **Biomechanical Linkage:** The slower, softer balls make it easier to use good rotation from the ground up without the psychological fear of sending the ball out.
- **Reception Height:** Although players must learn to receive high and low balls, there are less extremes, and the high and low balls are proportionate to the player's physical size.
- **Reception Speed:** The ball speed is also proportionate to the player's size and strength.

### Volleys

- **Reception Speed:** Players can develop all the volley actions (catch, touch, punch, etc.) and are not stuck only 'blocking' the faster regulation balls.
- **Biomechanical Linkage:** If players are not stuck blocking, they can volley with their feet and use their bodies more effectively.

## Serve

- **Biomechanical Linkage:** Players can use their bodies better from the ground-up.
- **Grip:** It is easier to develop a continental as the ball is lighter and the player doesn't have to modify for sending the heavier ball further and the

Although some coaches who have not used the equipment in this way (to develop advanced technique) often 'disagree' with the Progressive tennis concept, no coach I am aware of (maybe someone will email me) that has used the equipment ever goes back. As Head of Coaching Certification for British Columbia, I have trained hundreds of coaches in this approach. After experiencing the appropriate equipment, not one has ever said the adult equipment is better for developing the above listed elements.

As a matter of fact, the only thing that I know about a coach who says tennis shouldn't be taught this way is that, they haven't used the equipment!

## Less Injuries?

The final technical advantage is injury reduction. The physical demands of the game on junior players has increased over the last decade. The full-body technique required to hit the ball harder and with more spin are utilized by younger and younger players. This can be very hard on a developing body. The constant hitting of adult balls, with adult racquets, over the greater distances of the adult sized court, creates wear and tear on young bodies.

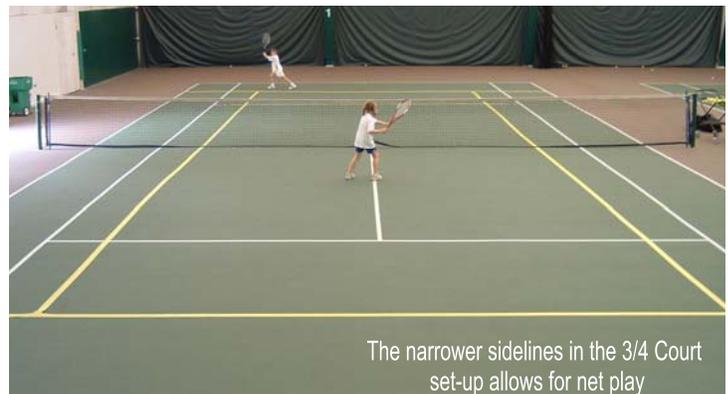
Although I am not aware of any studies, we are finding the Progressive Tennis equipment allows the players to use advanced technique but avoid the injuries.

## TACTICAL DEVELOPMENT

Technique is not the only element hurt by inappropriate equipment. Good tactical development is also at stake. Here are a few tactical aspects affected by scale:

- **Style of Play Development:**

Kids on a full-size court have far more ground to cover than if the court is scaled. The result, they tend to hit high arcing balls to give time to chase shots down. The style of play becomes very defensive. With Progressive Tennis, players can successfully explore all-court, counter-puncher, or net rushing styles. They even come to the net regularly (something rarely seen when kids use full-sized equipment and courts since it is far too difficult to cover the court).



The narrower sidelines in the 3/4 Court set-up allows for net play

- **Phase of Play Development:** With full-sized play, defense is the primary phase utilized. The other phases of play (attack, forcing, counter, and a proper neutral rally) are all difficult to successfully execute. Scaled tennis allows all the phases to be developed.
- **Shot Selection Development:** Varying the ball is extremely difficult with regulation equipment and courts. Players get stuck hitting high arcs to the middle of the court. Angles, spins, drives and drops are all available with the scaled equipment (We know because players in our program do them).

Why would a coach settle for a player who is just consistent when they could also have the ability to play and make decisions that are just like the ones they will use when they are older. When players are developed with Progressive Tennis, they look just like the pros when they play, just smaller.

## **CONCLUSION**

The ITF has endorsed this method as part of their world-wide Tennis...Play and stay initiative ([www.tennisplayandstay.com](http://www.tennisplayandstay.com)). The USTA is also launching their new "Quick Start" initiative for  $\frac{1}{2}$  Court and  $\frac{3}{4}$  Court play. Hopefully, this will be the dawn of a new era to encourage growth and retention of young tennis players. Parents and coaches have an unprecedented opportunity to cooperate with tennis becoming more accessible for young children.

Of course all these same advantages can be realized by adults as well if they use the modified balls (our Adult Beginner leagues use transition balls).