



## PROGRESSIVE TENNIS – Innovation in Junior Development

### Introduction

A mini-revolution is brewing in North America. The approach is called “Progressive Tennis.” It is imported from European countries such as France and Belgium where it was used to successfully develop players like Justine Henin-Hardenne and Olivier Rochus. Progressive Tennis uses a systematic progression of court sizes, balls, and racquets, to scale the game down to an appropriate level for 5-10 year olds.

Modified racquets and balls are not new. The equipment has been around for a while, as has the “graduated length” concept. Coaches have used bits and pieces for years seeing the advantage from the perspective of success, fun and safety. The difference this time is that all these elements have been brought together in a much more systematic way than ever before. Tennis companies now carry the full line of half-court and ¾-court progressive equipment including graduated, balls, racquets, lay down lines and nets.

The power of the progressive tennis system is that it allows players to *play* quickly and successfully. In Progressive Tennis, the philosophy is that tennis is a great and fun game to play and the quicker and more skillfully a player can play the more fun it is. Each stage not only has specific equipment to aid success, but particular skills to develop as well. It is recommended a Game-Based Approach be used. **The coach’s job is to get them to play, and help them learn to play better.**

Simply put, “Progressive Tennis” is used as a developmental tool to allow young children to improve their overall tennis skills faster so they can transition to the regular court with more ease.

### Progressive Stages

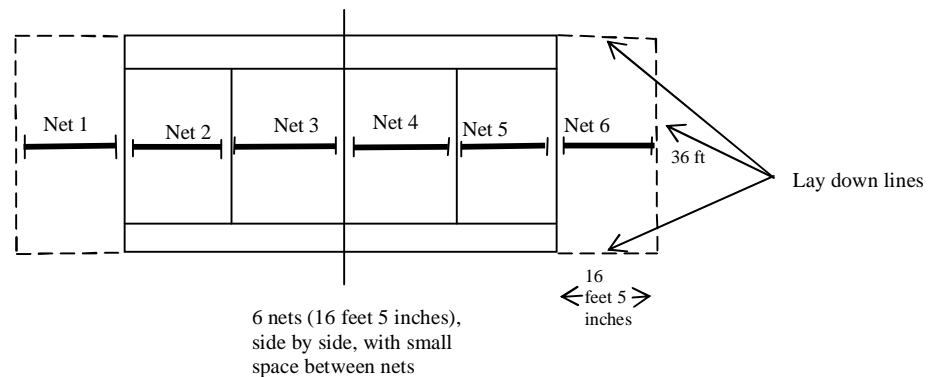
Red Stage: Half-Court Tennis (often called “Mini Tennis”); 5-7 year olds

Half-Court tennis is the first step in progressive tennis. The transition to successful half-court tennis will require a period of skill development where basic co-ordination and cooperative activities will lead to the development of the basic strokes and fundamentals. Hence, Half-Court programs will often need to be broken into two programs: one for experienced kids who have some basic exchanging ability who will be able to begin competing and training at half court and the other for kids who are just starting the game.

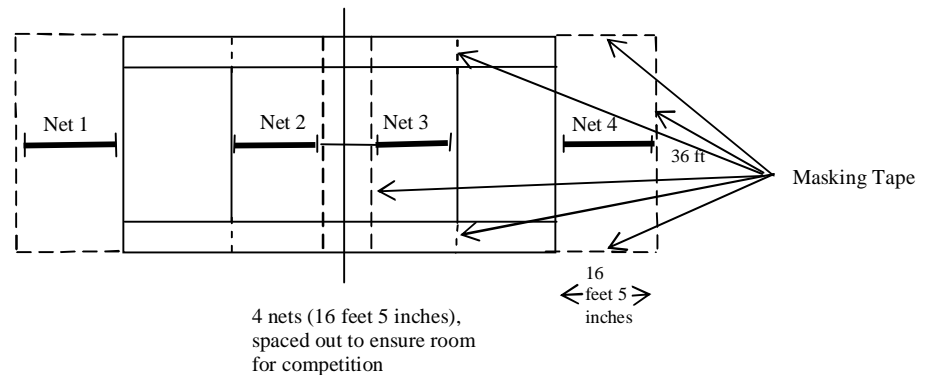


- Court Dimensions (there are two options):
  - service line to service line using the service lines as baselines (42 ft, 12.8 meters), and existing sideline and centre line as sidelines (18 ft or 5.50 meters); the existing court net height is reduced to 80 cm (31.5 inches)
  - doubles sideline to doubles sideline using the width of the court and the double sidelines as the baseline (36 ft, 11 meters); 16 mini nets are required to make each court; lay down lines are also required to establish boundaries of court

Note: Either length is fine for competition or training, although using the width of the court is more conducive for larger numbers as you can have 6 practice courts and 4 competition courts. The service court option provides only two competition courts and practice courts.



### PRACTICE



### COMPETITION

- Ball: an oversize, high-density foam (or red) ball which is easier to visually track, receive, and control, since it travels slower and bounces lower.
- Racquet: A 19ö-21ö racquet is recommended.
- Rules: Games to 11, 15, or 21 are generally recommended. The server has two chances to put ball in play. The first chance is overhead and the second can be underhand. The serve can land anywhere in the opponent's court.

## Orange Stage: 3/4 Court Tennis; 7-9 Year Olds

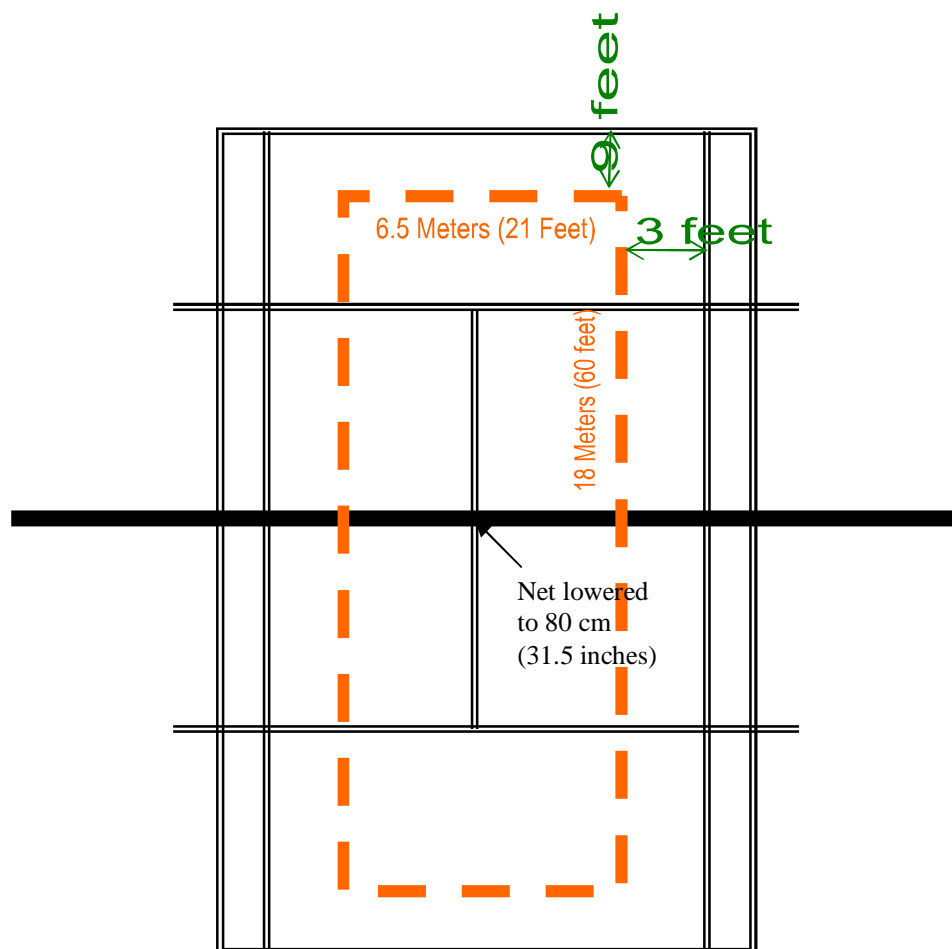
The  $\frac{3}{4}$  Court stage, is the most important stage of this progressive development. As the court dimensions are adjusted smaller but with a similar ratio as the full court. This step helps ensure the development of an all-



court game style with net-play. The key is to develop the same tactics as full court tennis along with the associated techniques.

Players will move to  $\frac{3}{4}$  Court once they have a full repertoire of skills at the half court. For most players who have gone through the half court program this transition will take place at 7 years of age. There will also be some late starters or less coordinated players who will make this transition at 8-9 years of age.

- Court Dimensions: in the  $\frac{3}{4}$  Court, the ratio of length to width is basically the same as a full sized court is to an adult.  $\frac{3}{4}$  Court tennis is played on a 18 (60 feet) x 6.5 meter (21 feet) court. The net height is 80 cm (31.5 inches)



- Ball: low-compression balls (orange) that facilitate longer exchanges as these balls are easier to control and don't bounce as lively as a regular ball. They also assist development of good biomechanics.
- Racquet: 23ö (depending on child's size)
- 3/4 Court Competition is played with full court tennis rules. Scoring can vary, i.e. 2 out of 3 sets to 4 with a tie breaker at 3-3 all; 8 game pro sets

### Green Stage: Full Court Tennis; 9-10 Year Olds

Players will move to full court once they have a full repertoire of skills at the ¾ court. For some very highly skilled players this will be at 8 years of age, however for most players who have gone through the half and ¾ court programs this transition will take place at 9 years of age. There will also be some late starters or less athletic players who will make this transition at 10 years of age.

This transition to full court tennis will take place in a two step process. The first step will be with a transition ball which provides a more lively bounce than the low compression ball but not as much as a bounce as the regular ball (this will help promote the continued development of proper technique). This will help ensure longer points. The final step will be using the regular ball.



- Court Dimensions: regular court dimensions
- Ball: low-compression balls (i.e. Wilson 'Easy Play') that facilitate longer exchanges as these balls are easier to control and don't bounce as lively as a regular ball. They also assist development of good biomechanics.
- Racquet: 23-25ö (depending on child's size)
- Full Court Competition is played with regular full court tennis rules. Scoring can vary, i.e. 2 out of 3 sets to 4 with a tie breaker at 3-3 all; 8 game pro sets; 10 game pro sets, etc...

*A special thanks to Wayne Elderton for his contribution to this article on progressive development.*