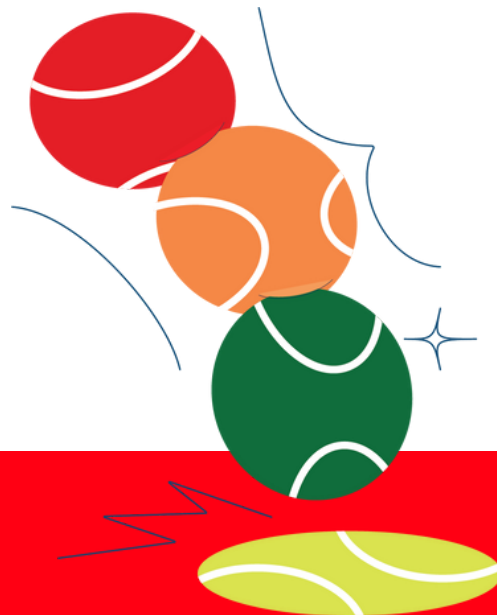ROGERS
First Set

FIRST SET

A tennis curriculum for
starting players at the
fundamental stage of development

TENNIS CANADA

TENNIS CANADA IS PROUD TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT THIS PROJECT IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL ASSOCIATIONS

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PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

The **First Set Learn & Play** curriculum is built on two principles:

Player Identity: Helping players adopt the identity that 'I am a tennis player'.

Player-Centered: Activities fit for the child (rather than squeezing the child into the activities)

The structure and tools provided in the curriculum are resources for working towards these principles.

Player Identity:

- **Point-Play Pyramid Development Structure:** All activities are wrapped around the goal of Point-Play and are designed and sequenced to develop Point-Play skills. Players can experience tennis play in modified forms even if they are not skillful enough to play full tennis.
- **Play Days:** To run play during an entire session or as an event using Point Play and Play Format activities.
- **Basic Tactics Tool:** A tactical system is provided so 'game players' are developed (in contrast to kids that just hit balls).
- **Coach the Ball Tool:** Controlling the ball is essential for players to be able to successfully play the game.

Player Centered:

- **Activities Menu Tool:** A list of over 60 activities are provided so coaches have multiple options to adjust activities to the players.
- **Skill Observation Scale Tool:** A practical coaching tool is included to help coaches identify and maintain the appropriate challenge level. This assists activities to be better suited to the players.
- **Activity Areas Tool:** A menu of activity area sizes are provided so coaches can tailor activities to players' level by modifying the size of the area activities are run on.
- **'Road To Rally' Tool:** A series of progressions are provided to ease players into exchanging the ball with each other (rally).

ACTIVITY MENU TOOL

At the core of the First Set curriculum is a menu of multiple activities to help players develop. All of the activities are divided into the following categories that provide a purpose for the activities:

Point-Play Activities: These are the main pillar of the whole curriculum and are 'oppositional games' that allow player to experience how to serve, rally & score and play the game with simple tactics and techniques.

Warm-up Activities: These are all group-based and are designed not only to physically warm-up players at the start of each session but, help build community, teamwork and making friends. They provide opportunity for coaches to create a Fair-Play Culture from the beginning of every session.

Coordination Activities: These help develop Fundamental Movement Skills (e.g. Throwing, catching, running, controlling the racquet & ball) which are essential to perform more complex skills that ultimately progress to all the various Point-Play activities in the curriculum. These activities also continue building friends and teamwork.

Road to Rally Activities: These activities serve as lead-up skills necessary for players to develop befroe engaging in ball exchanges. They emphasize enhancing players' hand-eye coordination, timing, and technique.

"I Can" Skill Set Activities: Playing tennis (whether Red, Orange or Green) can be sub-divided into 3 key situations. These categories help coaches work on specific elements of the game:

- **I Can Rally:** Rallying (being able to exchange the ball) is the first challenge to overcome in order to open up the world of tennis to a player. To build rally skills coaches can use the 'Road to Rally' (Rally Continuum) Tool which includes a series of progressions from simple actions (e.g. pushing the ball along the ground) to exchanging the ball in a rally over a net.

- **I Can Start a Point:** All point-play begins with a serve or return. The 'skill-builder' activities range from overhand throw skills, and transferring to developing the serve, as well as return.

- **I Can Play Net:** One important aspect of tennis is approaching and playing the net. Players learn to take the ball in the air for volleys and overheads.

Warm-Up

WU1	Rob the Nest
WU2	Cone Flip
WU3	Tunnel Ball
WU4	Snakes and Ladders
WU5	Basketball Tag
WU6	Court Parts
WU7	Ball Chase
WU8	Shuffle & Catch
WU9	Cone Call
WU10	Merry Go Round
WU11	Clear the Bedroom

Coordination

CO1	Knock Ball
CO2	Castles
CO3	Goals
CO4	Rak Attack
CO5	Dodgems
CO6	Caterpillar
CO7	Sandwich Stack
CO8	Bungee
CO9	Team Relay

Road to Rally

RR1	Floor Rally
RR2	Push It
RR3	Throw and Catch Progressions
RR4	Racquet Control Progressions
RR5	Toss, Track and Tap
RR6	Feed & Rally
RR7	Self Rally

I Can Rally

RY1	Rally Builder
RY2	Rack Up Rally
RY3	Rally Racers
RY4	Race to Base
RY5	Squeeze Rally
RY6	Battle Cones

I Can Start a Point

SR1	Ready Aim Fire
SR2	Catapult Serve
SR3	Sky Ball
SR4	Flying Target
SR5	Climb Serve Mountain
SR6	Serve, Return + 1
SR7	Serve to Target
SR8	Nominated Serve
SR9	In the Freezer
SR10	Serve & Return Team Challenge

I Can Play Net

NT1	Self Volley Keep Ups
NT2	Penalty Shoot Out
NT3	Groundstroke to Volley
NT4	Partner Approach and Volley
NT5	Waves
NT6	Capture the Net
NT7	Overhead and Volley
NT8	Attack and Defend

Point Play

PP1	Floor Tennis
PP2	Throw Tennis
PP3	Racquet Toss Tennis
PP4	Tap Tennis
PP5	2 vs 1
PP6	Champions
PP7	Charger Singles
PP8	Doubles Champions
PP9	Top Dog
PP10	Team Tennis

Play Formats

PF1	Multi-Court Champions
PF2	Ups & Downs
PF3	Team Cones
PF4	Team Challenge
PF5	Round Robin
PF6	Team Tennis Playoffs
PF7	Compass Draw

PLAY FORMATS

Play formats are specific ways to organize multi-court Point-Play competition. For many starting players the word 'tournament' may be intimidating so 'Play Event', or 'Play Day' is found to be more suitable to market organized competition.

Play Formats	
PF1	Multi-Court Champions
PF2	Ups & Downs
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FAIR PLAY CULTURE

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A 'Fair Play culture' permeates all First Set activities and includes:

- Tennis etiquette
- Knowing the rules
- Respecting others
- Fair play behaviours

These behaviours are encouraged and woven into every session and form a base of values that create an overall culture of players with positive character and confidence.

SESSION STEPS

Every session follows a set series of steps so coaches can unfold a session in an effective and logical way and connect everything to Point-Play.

STEP 1

MEET & GREET
Create a welcoming environment (e.g. Learn players names.)

STEP 2

WARM-UP
Prepare players for physical activity and build teamwork.
Note: Follow with Coordination Activity for additional skill development.

STEP 3

POINT PLAY
Compete in regular tennis or modified tennis points
Note: This step may be skipped in shorter 1-hour sessions.

STEP 4

PRACTICE
Implement Coordination and Skill-Builder activities to enhance Point-Play.

STEP 5

POINT PLAY
Integrate skills into Point Play (Compete in regular or modified Point Play)

STEP 6

WRAP-UP
Summarize what was accomplished and inspire going out and playing.

POINT PLAY DEVELOPMENT

The curriculum is built around the goal of helping kids take on a **'player identity'**. To view themselves as **tennis players** rather than 'lesson-takers' which will increase their motivation to play and practice more frequently. However, for many starting players, the full game of tennis is too difficult to play. How can one take on the identity of a player when they cannot play?

Priority of Point-Play

The curriculum solves this problem by identifying the core of playing tennis:
To serve, rally and score with players competing against each other with a ball in a defined area. ('Oppositional Point-Play').

The curriculum uses modified oppositional games which are simplified forms of Point-Play so tennis can be successfully played without having all the skills necessary to play full tennis. These four point-play games can be used with Red, Orange, Green or Yellow balls and include:
- **Floor Tennis:** Receiving & sending the ball by pushing it along the court.
- **Throw Tennis:** Receiving & sending the ball without a racquet.
- **Racquet Toss Tennis:** Receiving & sending the ball by trapping it on the strings and 'flinging' it to the opponent.
- **Tap Tennis:** Receiving & sending the ball by tapping it up on the strings before sending it.

These 4 versions of Point-Play games all lead up to ultimately playing **Regular Tennis** where players **serve, rally & score** in full Red, Orange, Green, or Yellow-ball tennis.

Point Play Development Pyramid

All 4 versions of Point-Play are at the top of the **'Point-Play Development Pyramid'.** The Point-Play Pyramid progresses from the base section Coordination Activities to the mid-section **Skill-Builder/Exchange Skills Activities** and finally to the pinnacle **Point-Play Activities**. Any of the Point-Play activities can be used to compete with Floor tennis, Throw Tennis, Toss Tennis, Tap Tennis (e.g. '2 vs 1 -PP5' or 'Champions-PP6'), or, Regular Tennis (Played on Red/Orange/Green/Yellow courts and balls).

POINT PLAY
Serve, Rally, and Score

SKILL BUILDER (EXCHANGE) ACTIVITIES:
I Can Rally / I Can Start a Point / I Can Play Net

COORDINATION ACTIVITIES:
Physical literacy skills foundational to Point-Play
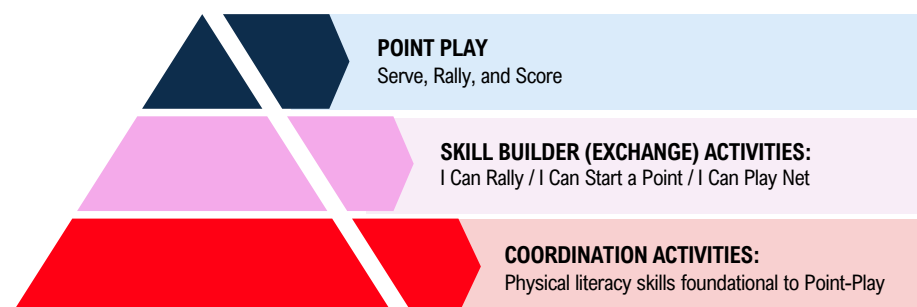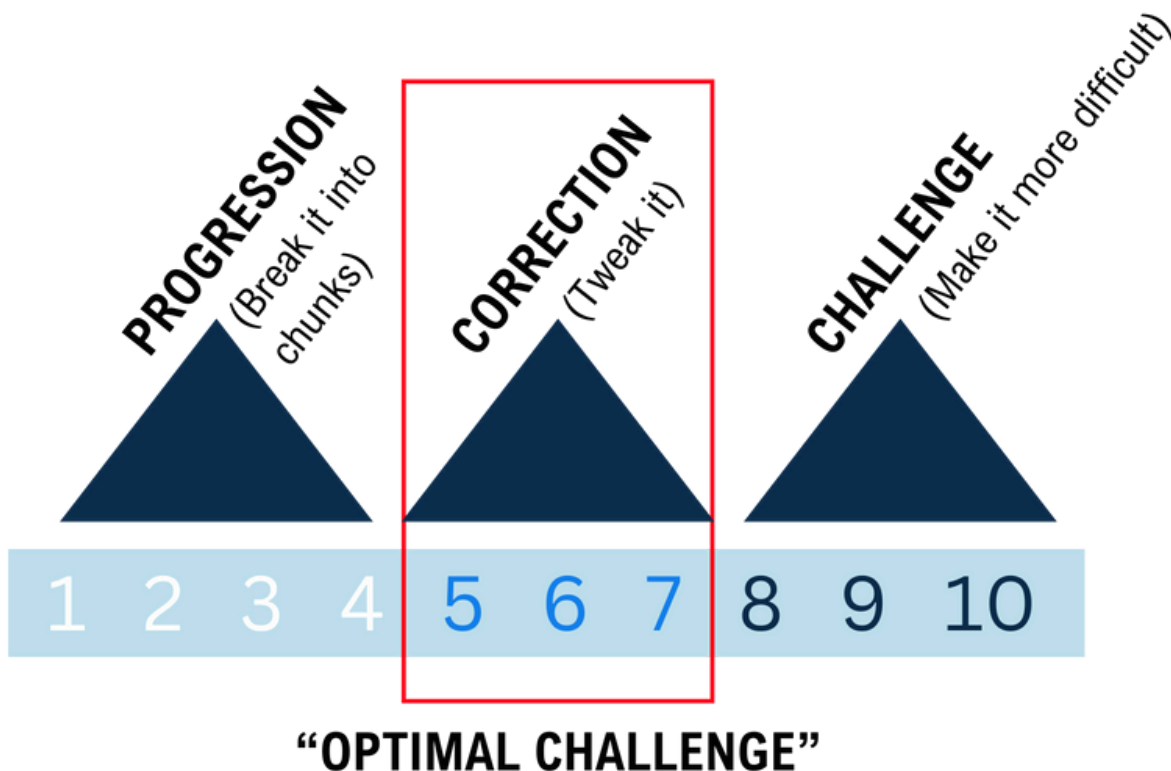
SKILL OBSERVATION TOOL

The most effective learning environments ensure players do activities at an appropriate challenge level. Players engaged in activities where they are successful 50-70% of the time are more motivated to continue and maintain focus and effort. This constitutes the "optimal challenge" level.

Activities too difficult (less then 50% success) increases the possibility of players giving up due to lack of success. Too easy (over 70% success) and players may become bored and disengage or even misbehave.

Skill Observation Scale

A simple and effective way to gauge success is to use the Skill Observation Scale (SOS). The coach identifies how successful players are at an activity out of 10 attempts:

- Achieving between 0-4/10: Modify the activity to a less challenging version (In which case a 'progression' is warranted).
- Achieving between 8-10/10: Modify the activity to a more challenging version.
- Achieving 5-7 is optimal and means the activity is in the "Optimal challenge" level. Only corrections are required to steer the performance in the right direction.

PROGRESSION (Break it into chunks)   **CORRECTION** (Tweak it)   **CHALLENGE** (Make it more difficult)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

"OPTIMAL CHALLENGE"

MOVEMENT PROGRESSIONS TOOL

When players are successful less than 40% of the time, it is most effective to employ a progression. The problem with kids doing activities with little success is that they will often loss confidence. Who wants to continue in activities one is unsuccessful at?

Progressions take the final skill and divide it into smaller more easily managed pieces. The simpler version allows for more success. The skill can be built back up to the final version while keeping the players in a 'momentum of success'. Standard

The standard progression used in the curriculum is a progression of movement, who the activity is done with (with self or, with partner) and is it over a net or not:

BASIC PROGRESSION
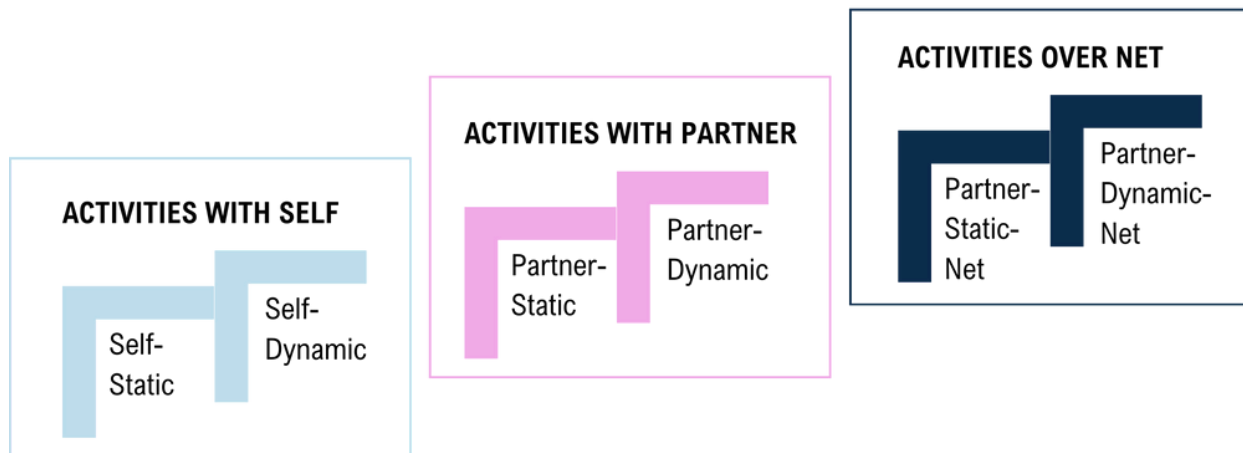
Basic Progression Steps

Activities with Self
- Self-Static: Activities done with yourself (e.g. tapping a ball up on the strings to yourself)
- Self-Dynamic: Activities done with yourself with movement
    - Movement Side to side
    - Movement up and back (towards the net and away from the net)

Activities with Partner (with no net between players)
- Partner-Static: Activities done with a partner with little to no movement
- Partner-Dynamic: Activities done with a partner and with movement

Activities over a Net
- Partner-Static-Net: Activities done with a partner with little to no movement and over a net
- Partner-Dynamic-Net: Activities done with a partner with movement and over a net

ACTIVITY COURT DIMENSIONS

To make an activity more or less challenging, the activity can be run in an area that promotes players success. The curriculum provides 7 different sizes and shapes of areas that can be used for many of the activities. The areas are not specifically connected to a colour of ball (e.g. 'Red' Court, 'Orange' Court, etc.) they are simply used as tools to ensure an effective environment appropriate to the skill level of the players.

1 **Micro Square:** Many activities in the Learn & Play curriculum utilize a Micro Square for Red, Orange, and Green activities to allow for a smaller court space to modify play for beginner players. Micro Square is often used in the Road to Rally activities/progressions.

2 **Micro Court:** Micro Court can be set up *widthwise* for Red Court and *lengthwise* for Red, Orange, and Green Courts.

3 **Service Boxes:** Can be used as a Service Box for an activity without a net or both Service Boxes over the regular net for ROG.

4 **Mini-Court:** Can be set up *widthwise* for Red Court and *lengthwise* for Re, Orange, and Green courts (includes the doubles alley).

5 **3/4 Court:** This court area is used for Orange Court when at the appropriate level.

6 **1/2 Full Court:** This court area is used for Green Court when at the appropriate level.

7 **Full Court (Singles/Doubles):** This is the full regular tennis court and is used for Green Court when at appropriate level.

Widthwise Set-Up (Red Court Only)
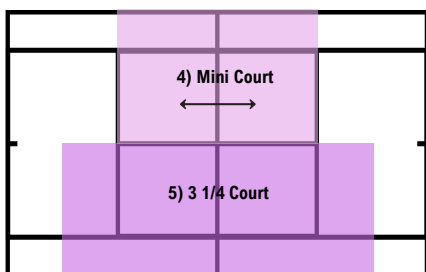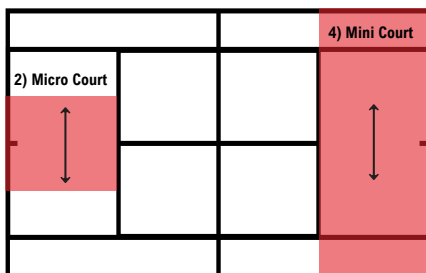
Lengthwise Set-Up (ROG)

First Set
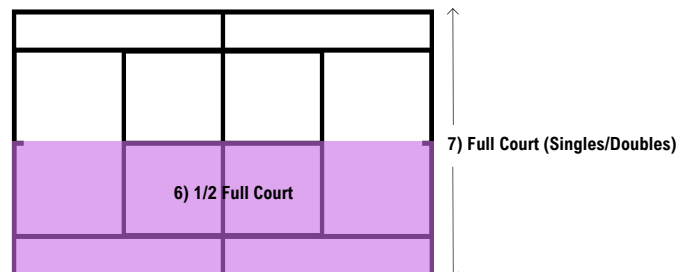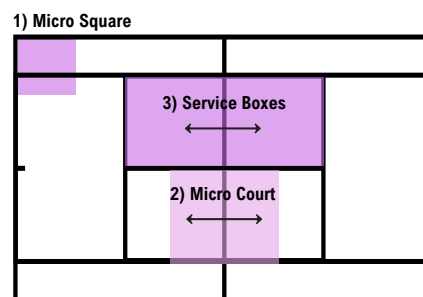
ROAD TO RALLY TOOL

The first and most important hurdle to clear when learning tennis is to gain the ability to exchange the ball (rally). Rallying from the baseline (of the appropriate colour ball) over the net is challenging. There are a series of activities that prepare players to rally. This rally continuum is called the 'Road to Rally'. These skills are a progression to build up to a rally. They are also used to target rally activities to keep players in the 'Sweet Spot'. For example, in a rally activity where players are to exchange the ball, the coach notices they are unsuccessful. The coach then switches to step 4 (discontinuous Drop/Send/Stop rally) for the players to experience success.

ROAD TO RALLY (Rally Continuum)

Maintain 'formula' of neutral exchange: Ball Received = Ball Sent (Br=Bs)

STEP 6
Continuous Rally

STEP 5
Self-Rally/Send (Tap)
Discontinuous Rally
-Self-rally/Send/Stop
-Self-rally/Send/Self-rally/Send
(Reduce amount of self-rallies before sending)

STEP 4
Drop/Send/Stop
Discontinuous Rally
-Drop/Send/Stop
-Drop/Send/Send/Stop
(Build up # of sends)

STEP 3
Racquet Toss

STEP 2
Throw

STEP 1
Floor
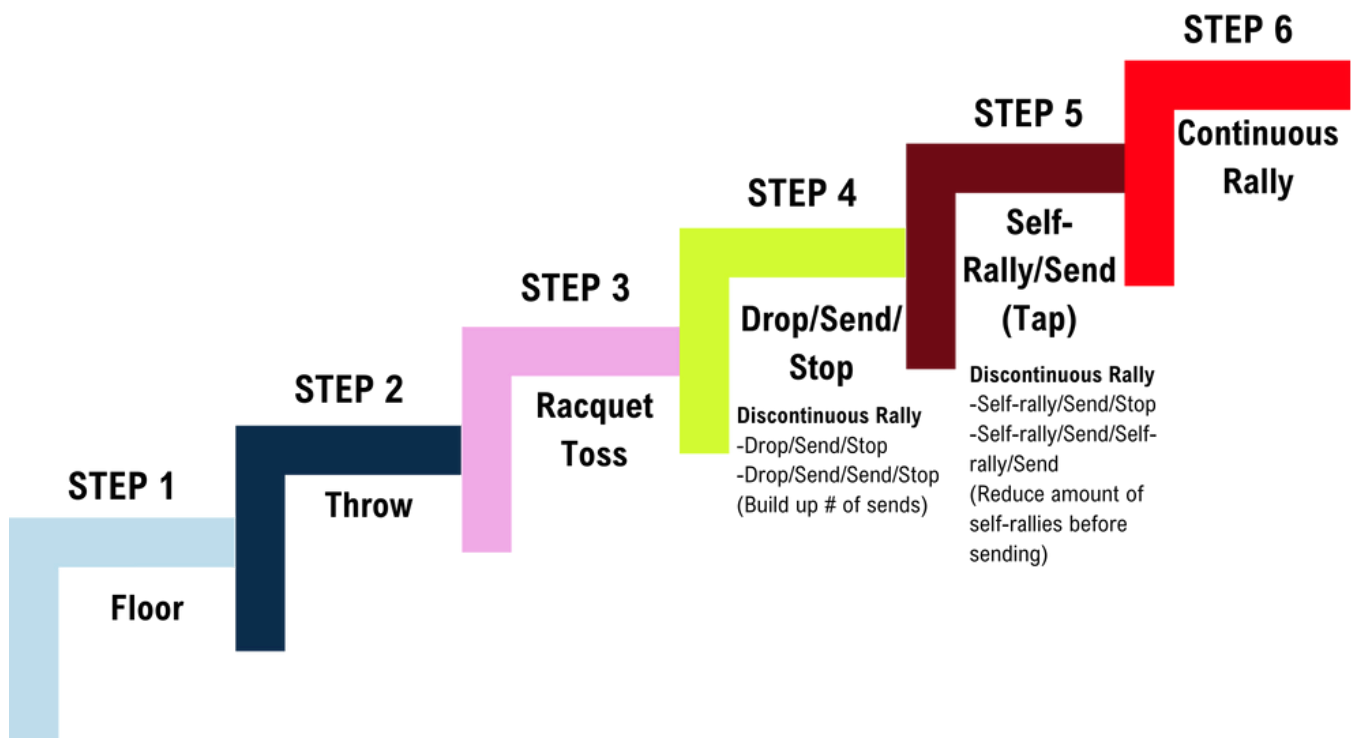
BASIC TACTICS TOOL

Since the curriculum is based on play, tactics are an important part of the curriculum. Tactics are essential in order to win any game (whether chess, hockey or tennis). To take on the identity of a 'player', kids need the ability to apply basic tennis tactics.

The 4 basic tactics are:

Outlast the Opponent | **Move** the Opponent | **Take Time Away** | **Gain Time**
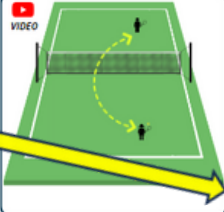
Players are encouraged to apply tactics in all Learn & Play activities. The number one tactic emphasized throughout the entire curriculum is consistency. This is expressed in simpler terms to players as 'Outlast your Opponent'.

Every activity includes the tactic a coach should highlight

By regularly being exposed to the ways they can win (tactics), players will learn to play the game. They will also be more motivated to learn and practice skills (technique) as, they will see what they need to win against opponents and understand how their skills provide the means they utilize to perform the tactics.

COACHING THE BALL TOOL

Playing the game requires tactics and, in tennis, executing any tactic requires controlling the ball. Helping players to control the ball is called **'Coaching the Ball'.**

To coach the ball it is important to be aware that the ball can only be manipulated in 5 different ways. Theses are the **5 Ball Control Characteristics**. Players must learn to receive variations of these and send variation of these:

Height: Receive and send the ball higher or lower
Direction: Receive and send the ball to the right or left
Distance: Receive and send the ball shorter or further
Speed: Receive or send the ball faster or slower
Spin: Receive or send the ball with topspin, underspin, sidespin or flat

Note: Spin is a more advanced concept and is not covered in the First Set curriculum.

All of these are for the purpose of executing a tactic. For example, to outlast an opponent with consistency, a player needs to clear the ball over the net to avoid net errors (height). To use space and move an opponent a player would need to control the direction.

The second element for Coaching the Ball is what the player does to manipulate any of the 5 Ball Control Characteristics.Controlling the ball is based on what the racquet does when it contacts the ball. The physics of that moment determines what the ball does.

The ball is controlled by the **P.A.S. Principles:**
The **Path** of the racquet at impact
The **Angle** of the racquet at impact
The **Speed** of the racquet at impact

Every shot in tennis is simply a recipe of the racquet P.A.S.

A 'Coaching the ball' section is included on the activity sheets

SHOT CYCLE TOOL

Tennis is a dynamic game. Although it is sometimes required to practice skills from a static standing position, players should practice moving as soon as possible.

A tennis shot typically occurs in a cycle of movements & actions. Called 'The Shot Cycle', it should be incorporated into activities as soon as possible.

The cycle has 4 components:

1.**Ready Position**: All tennis movements should start with an athletic position where the player's body and racquet are primed for action.

2.**Set-up:** Everything the player must do to set-up and prepare for being in the right place, at the right time to receive the ball (whether with a racquet in the air, along the ground or, catching without a racquet).

3.**Controlling the Ball:** The moment the player addresses the ball (whether with the racquet or, catching) and all they need to do to send it.

4.**Recovery:** Tennis shots can happen multiple times in a point. A player is not done once they hit the ball. Getting ready for the next shot once the ball is sent is critical to successfully handle the next shot. Player must incorporate recovery into all their shots.

For example, even when doing 'Throw-Tennis', players need to start ready, set-up & move to receive the ball, control the ball & send it and recovery for the next shot cycle to repeat. This will develop their ability to play points effectively.