

VARIETY... THE SPICE OF TENNIS LESSONS

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If you are in the tennis coaching business, and you want to stay in it and grow the business, you need to be well up on the principles of “marketing”. Many books have been written on this subject, by people who know an awful lot more about it than I do.

But I want to write for a minute about a little marketing tool that is probably not covered anywhere in the literature, because it relates specifically to coaching, and more specifically to coaching children...

I see many coaches who have developed a habit of always doing the same drill or exercise to finish off a group lesson. This has advantages – the children know the exercise well, so it does not take much time to set up. It is probably an exercise the children enjoy doing – that would help explain why it is the one chosen to round off the session.

But I firmly believe that the disadvantages of this approach outweigh the advantages. Lets look at it from a marketing point of view. Who encourages children to take tennis lessons, gets them to the sessions and pays for them? Of course the answer is their parents. They drop the children off at the club, and then usually head away to attend to whatever business is at hand. When they return to collect the children, they are generally a few minutes early, and naturally spend the time watching the conclusion of the lesson.

If a parent always sees his or her child perform the same exercise, it must be tempting for that parent to think that there is not much variety in the sessions, and not a whole lot of progress being made. The thought process is likely to be *“this is the same thing as I saw last week, and the week before, and the week before that! Is this the only game this coach knows?”* If the game is one that involves for example, groundstroke’s, will a parent ever get to see his or her child serve, or approach the net, hit a smash or a return of serve? There is a danger of being incorrectly labeled in a parents mind as a `one dimensional` coach who does not help pupils develop a rounded game. And labels can prove hard to get rid of...

It is important to take the approach of finishing off your lessons with different games, exercises and drills. Taking this approach means that the parents sees their child's tennis as a whole, instead of always the same shot or tactic. And what is **the** most effective game to finish off with in this context? Its got to be a game of tennis – be it singles or doubles! In singles or doubles play, parents will see all the variety the game of tennis provides, and all the challenges their child is learning to deal with. And since no two points are ever exactly the same, a parent is never looking at the same thing twice.

Parents send their children to tennis lessons to get better at playing the game they know as tennis, which involves serving, rallying and scoring, moving around the court and the use of tactics. They do not send their child to tennis lessons to get better at a particular exercise or drill, no matter how ingenious that exercise or drill may be.

From a marketing point of view, the last five minutes of every group lesson for kids is the most important five minutes. The same principle holds true for that vital period as for the rest of the session - **think serve, rally and score and you can't go wrong.**