

# WHAT TENNIS RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT...COACHING METHODS

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## COACHING METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the effectiveness of the Task Method versus the Command Method of teaching the forehand and backhand ground strokes.

- The Command Method is described as being based on the command-response interaction between coach and player, the emphasis is placed on the subject matter and the role of the player in the learning experience is limited.
- The Task Method is described as providing the player with the opportunity to make many more decisions than in the command method, he or she has the authority to decide how many repetitions of a particular task to be performed, and when to stop. After demonstrating the skill to be performed the coach relinquishes his control over the player.

Players were given six weeks coaching for a total of 12 hours. Results revealed that:

1. The Task Method was superior to the command method in the coaching of the backhand,
2. The two methods were not different in the coaching of the forehand,
3. Both methods caused significant improvement in the performance of the two ground strokes,
4. The Task Method players had significantly greater retention for both ground strokes.

*Tom Mariani (1969). A comparison of the effectiveness of the command method and the task method of teaching the forehand and backhand tennis strokes. **The Research Quarterly**, Vol. 41, No. 2: 171-174.*

## PRACTICE ORGANISATION

This study examined the effect of practice organisation manipulations implemented in a coaching setting on the performance and learning of low- and high- skilled players. In five sessions of either blocked (focusing on one specific area) or alternating (varying the focus of the drills) practice organisation for the forehand and backhand ground strokes.

The players were tested before and after the practice and the results indicate that the practice organisation influenced player performance.

- Low skilled players assigned to the blocked practice performed better after practice than those who had been assigned to alternating practice.
- In contrast the highly skilled players were not influenced by the practice organisation, this highlights the importance of the type of practice organisation to be used for children and beginners.

*Herbert, E.P., Landin, D. & Solmon, M.A. (1996). Practice Schedule Effects on the Performance and Learning of*

*Low- and High- Skilled Students: An Applied Study. Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport Vol.67 (1): 52-58.*

## PLAYER TO PLAYER TUTORING IN TENNIS

This article highlights the potential for peer tutoring in early tennis sessions using a fellow player to observe the performance of the criterion skills.

- The criterion skills are determined by the coach and divided into levels. The player must practice the skills with their partner and the partner must observe the completion of the list of required skills before moving on to the next level. The coach then confirms the player's progress either by giving them additional assistance or signing them off to the next level.
- The players are normally allowed to choose their own partners, since they often select partners of similar skill level, thereby enhancing their own playing ability.
- Results have also been successful when higher skilled players worked with players with lower motor capabilities. The higher skilled students are challenged to find ways to assist the less skilled. In turn the less skilled receive individual assistance and guidance, and ultimately find success.

*Donna Chun (1996) Peer Tutoring in Tennis. **Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance** Vol.67(2): 12-15.*

## THE BEHAVIOUR OF MORE AND LESS SUCCESSFUL TENNIS COACHES

The behaviour of nine coaches of high school boys' tennis was described and analysed in this study. The coaches were categorised as either more or less successful, this was determined by the definition that a more successful coach was one who had a 70% winning record over the three years prior to the study. A less successful coach was one who only had a 50% winning record over the three years prior to the study. The results showed:

- Less successful coaches instructed more than more successful coaches
- Less successful coaches praised more than the more successful coaches, but the appropriateness of the praise to the situation was not determined
- More successful coaches questioned their players more than less successful coaches
- More successful coaches spent greater time in "silence", "management" and "other" activities than less successful coaches. The authors suggest that this may be due to a greater requirement for tennis players to have practice time without frequent instruction intervals.

*Claxton, D.B. (1988) A Systematic Observation of More and Less Successful High School Tennis Coaches. **Journal of Teaching in Physical Education**, 1988 (7): 302-310.*

## THE EFFECT OF PROACTIVE INTERFERENCE ON THE PLAYER'S ABILITY TO LEARN THE BACKHAND STROKE

Proactive interference is when the ability of an individual to perform a desired task is inhibited by the effect of a previously learned skill. In this study the effect of learning the forehand stroke prior and separate to the learning of the backhand stroke was investigated. The results show that:

- There was negative transfer when the players who first learned the forehand were required to learn the backhand
- This negative transfer was suggested to be a consequence of the differences in pivot and grip in the two techniques
- The study recommended that “the traditional instruction model of teaching forehand ground strokes be re-examined. In tennis, teaching forehand and backhand concurrently may initially present a confusing task to the learner, but such a procedure may lead to higher ultimate performance”.

*Eason, R.L., Smith, T.L. & Plaisance, E. (1989). Effects of Proactive Interference on Learning the Tennis Backhand Stroke. **Perceptual and Motor Skills**, 68: 923-930.*

## ENHANCING TENNIS COACHING USING A METAPHOR METHOD

Children and adolescents in a summer tennis instruction programme were taught a “metaphor method” for eliminating distractions and detrimental ideation. They visualised themselves enclosed in a bubble, cocoon, or chrysalis that separated them from non task stimuli.

- Ratings from coaches about the metaphor method demonstrated multiple advantages.
- When compared to the control group (players receiving regular instruction), players taught to use the boundary metaphors improved significantly in terms of performance criteria and the ability to concentrate.
- The coaches involved also rated the players higher in enjoyment of the experience, motivation, and a display of mature and appropriate behaviour.

*Efran, J.S., Lesser, G.S. & Spiller, M.J. (1994) Enhancing Tennis Coaching with Youths using a Metaphor Method. **The Sport Psychologist**, 8: 349-359.*