

PROGRESSIVE TENNIS – Innovation in Junior Development

A mini-revolution is brewing in Tennis world-wide. In Canada, the approach is called “Progressive Tennis”. It is imported from European countries like Belgium where it was used to successfully develop players like Justine Henin. In Switzerland, Roger Federer promotes the approach. In Brazil, Guga Kuerten is the spokesperson. 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.

Just like in most major sports world-wide, the game is scaled to the appropriate proportions for children. Tennis companies now carry the full line of modified racquets, balls, and court lines. The organization of the progression gives the approach more power to transform players better and faster. **Simply put, learning tennis is more effective with this progressional, systematic approach.**

SYSTEM BASICS

Here is the basic progression. Levels are colour-coded for easy recognition:

RED BALL:

½ Court Tennis (5-7 year olds)

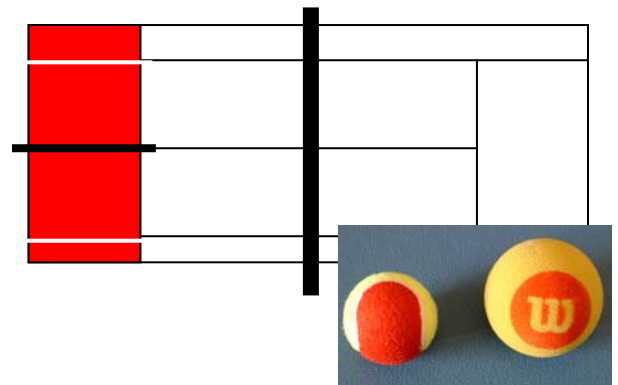
COURT: Net height: 80 cm (31.5 inches)

Length: 36 feet

Width: (singles): 18 feet

RACQUET: 19 or 21 inch
(depending on player size)

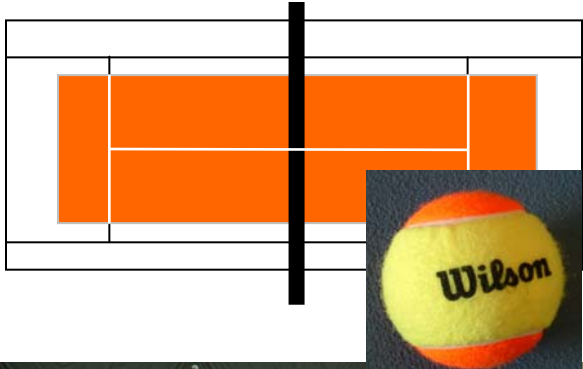
BALL: Oversize foam or felt ball



Red Ball Tennis is played sideways across the court. An oversize, high-density foam ball or felt ball is used. Since it flies slower and bounces lower it, is easier to visually track, receive, and control. Regular rules apply with the exception that the server can serve anywhere in the opponent’s court (in front of the regulation singles sideline) and the scoring is simplified to tie-breaker like single point scoring.



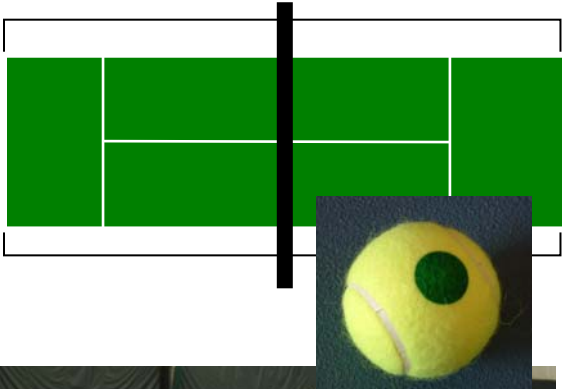
ORANGE BALL:
$\frac{3}{4}$ Court Tennis (7-9 year olds)
COURT: Net height: 80 cm (31.5 inches) Length: 60 feet Width: Singles: 21 feet Doubles: 27ft
RACQUET: 23 or 25 inch (depending on player size)
BALL: 50% compression ball



Orange Ball Tennis uses a scaled down court. For a 7-9 year old, the ratio of length to width is basically the same as a full sized court is to an adult. This allows for 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. It uses low-compression balls that facilitate this tactical development. The balls are easier to control and don't bounce as lively as a regular ball. They also assist development of good biomechanics. Full tennis rules apply with scoring being no-ad games with short sets (4 games) and a tie-breaker used in lieu of a third set.



GREEN BALL:
Full-Court Transition (9-10 year olds)
COURT: Net height: 91.5 cm (3 feet) Length: 23.77 m (78 feet) Width: Singles: 27 ft Doubles: 36 ft
RACQUET: 25 or 26 inch (depending on player size)
BALL: 75% compression 'transition' ball



The final step in the progression is to move 9-10 year olds to the full court with regulation rules and scoring. Transitional balls that fly slower and bounce lower are used to enhance consistency and control.



After 'graduating' from the Progressive Tennis System, 10-11 year olds would be fully developed to successfully use regular balls and play in regulation full court competition.

Of course, just like in all junior tennis divisions, very gifted players can be accelerated and can 'play up' in a higher stage prior to aging up.

THE PLAY IS THE THING

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. The quicker and more skillfully a player can play, the more fun it is. No need to 'dress it up' with trivial activities or use ineffective basket feeding with lines of players. Each stage not only has specific equipment to aid success, but particular skills to develop as well.

Progressive Tennis training sessions should include play and in BC, there is a schedule of leagues or even tournaments at all three stages.

The International Tennis Federation is currently modifying the rules of tennis world-wide to ensure young players compete using the appropriate specifications (specific court with specific ball, with appropriate racquet and scoring). **No U10 player (unless exceptionally gifted) should play on a regular court with regular balls.**

RESOURCES

A number of companies carry the equipment. Wilson has the full progression of racquets, balls. Mini-nets are also available that fold into a bag and take only a minute to set-up. Masking tape or "Drop-down" Lines are used to make court boundaries.

Using the Progressive Tennis approach can speed up the development of younger players. Tennis Canada is promoting the approach to all coaches and facilities.

