

IMPLEMENTING A COMPETITIVE FRAMEWORK

The following document is a guide for federations who wish to introduce a new competitive framework for tennis in their region. As supported by the major nations involved in the Tennis...Play and Stay campaign, the competitive framework incorporates the use of slower balls and smaller court sizes as well as multi-match formats suitable for starter players.

Tennis competition at most levels, most especially the starter and intermediate levels, requires considerable improvement if the sport is to achieve it's aim of retaining players and increasing participation worldwide. Knockout and consolation formats, long formats with lots of waiting and large time investment are not suitable for the majority of players.

In the past, most tennis competition and competitive structures have been designed to suit the minority (the elite and experienced players), now tennis must improve in providing suitable formats for all ranges of ages, abilities and time-constraints that exist. Knockout and consolation formats are still appropriate but only for a small percentage of events and most often for experienced competitors and higher-level players – not for the 42 year old mother with 3 young children or the 9 year old child learning the game.

Tennis must now offer multi-match formats with guaranteed matches and a set, short time period. Parents want to drop off their kids and know what time to pick them up. Adults want to know that if they have a party at 5pm that their tennis will be from 12pm-3pm and that they will get plenty of matches in between. Children, and adults, do not need a competitive structure that starts at the most difficult point (knockout), but one where they can learn to compete in tennis with team and multi-match formats that promote enjoyment, socialising and competitive and skill development, not winning, losing and elimination.

There are so many different needs for different players, which provides an exciting and profitable opportunity for the sport and those working for it. The job of the federation is to design a framework that provides opportunities for all, and the job for coaches is to choose the right competition for the players involved.

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COMPETITION FRAMEWORKS

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CREATING A COMPETITIVE FRAMEWORK FOR YOUR FEDERATION

Introduction

This document presents ideas on how to develop a national competition framework that promotes competitive opportunities for all ages and abilities of player. Also provided is a sample of how a competition framework can look.

Many nations are now promoting slower red, orange and green balls as well as smaller courts. Some of these nations are seeking to mandate the use of slower balls with starter players (especially those aged 10 and under) in competition to ensure that, not only do players play appropriate competition, but that in training, coaches are encouraged to use the slower balls with starter players.

In 2008, a trial appendix introduced to the Rules of Tennis made the use of the slower red, orange and green balls and smaller court sizes acceptable for official competition at age 10 and under. Children benefit from using the slower balls because the speed and bounce: allow players with little or no experience the time and control to start rallying from the first lesson, are more suited to the size and strength of the player, assist in developing better technique during the key learning stages (windows of opportunity) in the younger years and enable players to implement advanced tactics.

Adults also benefit from the slower balls. Whereas children will stay longer progressing through the coloured stages (see page 4), adults will not need to spend as long due to their size, strength and athletic skills. The benefit of using slower balls is that it gives them more time and control so they can play the game sooner than they could with a normal ball. Once they are able to serve, rally and score consistently with a full ball on a full court, then they can enjoy competing at this level.

Purpose of a Competitive Framework

Increasing Competitive Opportunities

By promoting the framework you promote and encourage coaches and competition organisers to run competitions and also raise awareness of the different competitive formats and opportunities available.

Increase Retention

The largest problem with tennis competition today is that the majority of players (especially non-performance players) are playing formats that are too time-consuming and not suited to their competitive aims. The use of knockout or consolation formats reduces the amount of matches that most players could play and leads to unpredictable timing.

By having a set time period for an event as well as guaranteed minimum number of matches for all players, more people will get involved in competition and keep competing. Having a less formal setting, than a knockout format provides, is beneficial for developing young players, and is the desire of the majority of older, non-performance players. By having events using slower balls for starter players, new competitive opportunities become available for players who previously could not compete due to an inability to rally with a full ball.

Consistency

By having a framework in place for competitions to follow, it removes the problems of having differences in competition formats from event to event. Players will now know exactly what ball type and court size they will use in competition

Improves Coaching Practices

Nations who have enforced the use of slower balls in competition have found that coaches are encouraged to use the balls more in their lessons too, this can lead to improved player development.

SAMPLE COMPETITIVE FRAMEWORK

The framework provided on pages 3-5 is an example of how your national competition framework could look.

Contents of the Framework

1. COMPETITION FRAMEWORK INFORMATION – Explains the framework and answers commonly asked questions
2. COMPETITIVE FRAMEWORK: JUNIORS (Ages up to 18 years) – Shows the location, level, ball and court type for competition at the different ages and abilities within the range
3. COMPETITIVE FRAMEWORK: ADULTS (Ages 18 years & over) – Shows the location, level, ball and court type suitable for competition at the different levels of ability
4. COMPETITION LEVELS – Gives detailed information on types of formats and scoring systems are suitable for different ages, abilities and experiences of players
5. BALLS AND COURTS – Gives more detail on the different ball types and court sizes at the Red, Orange, Green and Yellow (full) stages

Notes on the Framework

- Yellow balls are not used in 10 and under competition in this framework (exceptional players can play 11/12 & U)
- Adults have been put separately to emphasise the importance of having competitive provisions for adult players of all abilities and not just juniors or elite adults.
- If Red, Orange and Green balls are not all available, your framework could just use an Orange ball for all players aged 9/10 and under.

1. COMPETITION FRAMEWORK INFORMATION - Example

Intro

Thank you for taking the time to read the new Competitive Framework. This framework has been put together to improve the quality and increase the quantity of competitive events within tennis. The framework aims to provide competitive opportunities for all players, with formats available for different ages and abilities.

Understanding the Framework

The framework has 5 parts:

1. Information and Questions (this section)
2. Competition Framework: Juniors (Ages up to 18 years)
3. Competition Framework: Adults (Ages 18 & over)
4. Competition Levels – Explained
5. Balls and Courts – Explained

The frameworks and levels provide competition guidance for each age and ability group on:

- Type of ball
- Court Size
- Type of format
- Location of event (e.g. in the club, regional)

To understand what type of event you, your players or children should be playing, please refer to this framework. For more detail on the types of event, please view '3. Competition Levels – Explained'.

Running Competition Using This Framework

From **1st January 2009** all competition in (country name) must comply with the framework. There will be no recognition of results, funding or assistance for competitions that do not comply with the framework from the **1st January 2009**.

Using Slower Balls and Smaller Courts

Please note that within the framework, competition at 10 and under will use slower red, orange or green balls (if the player is aged 10 and under but exceptional then, with permission from the national association, they can play 11&U). The ITF recommends the use of slower balls for this age group. The slower balls give players more time and control allowing them to learn to play quicker, develop advanced technique and implement advanced tactics sooner.

Visit www.tennisplayandstay.com for further information on using slower balls and smaller courts.

Age Group Competition (11-18 years)

On the framework the information for ages 11-18 is grouped together, within this range, these age groups will apply: 11&U, 12&U, 13&U, 14&U, 16&U and 18&U.

Ratings

The International Tennis Number (ITN) rating is available for all abilities of player aged 10 years and above. All events played within this framework are eligible for ratings points and these will be processed from the event results by the competition organiser. To obtain a rating, visit www.itnoncourtassessment.com or email James.Newman@ITFTennis.com.

QUESTIONS?

Why does the framework start at 8 and under?

Although competition can start younger than age 7/8, this competition is not formalised but is heavily focused on skill development and with plenty of cooperative exercises and games. This difference is the reason for not including 6/7 and under as an age category.

What ball should I use?

This depends on your age and ability. Players aged 11 and over should train and compete with whichever ball they are able to rally consistently with. Players aged 10 and under should play with the ball recommended in the framework for their age. Late starters (ages 9 or 10) should start with the ball recommended for late starters until they can rally with the next ball available.

I'm only 10, can I play with a yellow ball?

Most players aged 10 and under will not compete using a yellow ball. If a player is exceptionally talented they can contact the national federation who may give permission to 'play up' in a higher age group.

Can you only play adult events once you are 18 years old?

No. In line with the ITF's age eligibility rule, those aged 13-18 are eligible to play a set amount of 'adult' events, however the majority will find similar standards of player within their age group.

When does the framework start?

The framework will be enforced from **1st January 2009** but competitions can be organised now.

How will I benefit from the framework?

PLAYERS benefit from knowing they are playing competition appropriate for their age and ability. For players aged 10 and under, the use of slower balls and smaller courts can improve their ability to play the game and develop their skills further than they could using a full ball on a full court

COACHES benefit from offering appropriate competition for all ages. By offering regular, appropriate, competitive opportunities, more players will be retained in tennis, meaning programmes will stay full. Coaches will also see their players develop quicker, as they play more outside of lessons and learn about competing

FEDERATIONS AND COMPETITION ORGANISERS benefit from having a consistent and appropriate framework to guide how competitions can be run to best suit the players involved. This gives variety to the type of events they get to run and focuses on their importance in producing performance players, and providing fun environments to keep players in the game.

Where can I access the slower balls?

Information on accessing the slower red, orange and green balls can be found at this address: www.tennisplayandstay.com/equipment/suppliers

Where can I find examples of suitable competition formats?

There are ready-made formats available at this address: www.tennisplayandstay.com/competitions

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact James Newman: James.Newman@ITFTennis.com or phone 00 44 20 83 92 47 70.

2. COMPETITIVE FRAMEWORK: Juniors (Ages up to 18 years)

AGES	8&U	9	10	11-18&U
INTERNATIONAL				
NATIONAL				
REGIONAL				
LOCAL	Red A	Orange B	Green B C	Yellow B C
IN THE CLUB	Red A	Orange A B	Green A B	Yellow A B

IN THE CLUB For Beginner/Late Starter players		Red A	Orange A	Green A
		Red A	Red A	Orange A
	8&U	9	10	11-18&U

Key:

A/B/C = Competition Levels (see page 5)

Red/Orange/Green/Yellow = Ball and courts (see page 5)

This age range is split into the following competitive age groups: 11&U, 12&U, 13&U, 14&U, 16&U, 18&U

3. COMPETITIVE FRAMEWORK: Adults (Ages 18 & Over)

INTERNATIONAL	Ball	Player Ability	Levels
	Yellow	Elite	C

NATIONAL	Ball	Player Ability	Levels
	Yellow	Elite	C

REGIONAL	Ball	Player Ability	Levels
	Yellow	Intermediate Advanced Elite	B C

LOCAL	Ball	Player Ability	Levels
	Yellow	Intermediate Advanced Elite	B C

IN THE CLUB	Ball	Player Ability	Levels
	Yellow	Beginners Intermediate Advanced	A B

IN THE CLUB	Ball	Player Ability	Levels
	Green	Starter Adults	A

IN THE CLUB	Ball	Player Ability	Levels
	Orange	Starter Adults	A

*Adults who can serve, rally and score with a full ball start above this line, adults who cannot start below

4. COMPETITION LEVELS - Explained

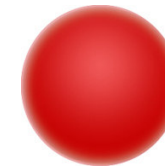
A – INTRODUCTION EVENTS	
Description	Short, multi-match formats that offer a comfortable introduction to tennis competition. The emphasis is on developing skills and enjoying learning to compete rather than winning and losing
For	Starter players of all ages with little or no competitive experience
Rating Guide	ITN 10.3 – ITN 9 (Can also be played by ITN 8-ITN 1)
Team/Individual	Mainly team formats with some individual too
Scoring	Tiebreaks to 5 or 7 (all ages), Best of 3 tiebreaks (8 years and over), Timed
Event Length	0-2 hours
Examples	Team Cones – Link Stick or Swap – Link Lucky Dip – Link

B – STANDARD EVENTS	
Description	Multi-match formats that can be of a greater duration than at the introduction level. The emphasis is on developing skills and competitive strength and enjoying playing matches. Common formats include round robin boxes, leagues and other formats that promote a positive, social and competitive experience.
For	Players with some experience of tennis competition aged 8/9 years or over
Rating Guide	ITN 9 – ITN 1 (Also Orange and Green players aged 8/9-10)
Team/Individual	Both team and individual
Scoring	Best of 3 Tiebreaks (8 years and above), Best of 3 short sets (9 years and above), 1 standard set (10 years and above), Timed
Event Length	2 hours (8 years and above) 3 hours-2 days (9 years and above) Long-term events, eg leagues (8 years and above)
Examples	Team Round Robin – Link Pyramid – Link Mission Possible - Link

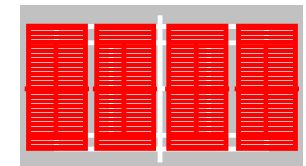
C – ADVANCED EVENTS	
Description	Consolation and knockout events for experienced competitors
For	Players aged 10 and over with a large amount of competitive experience
Rating Guide	ITN 6-1
Team/Individual	Both team and individual
Scoring	Best of 3 short sets with optional 3 rd set tiebreak (10 years and above), Best of 3 standard sets with optional 3 rd set tiebreak (11 years and above), Best of 5 standard sets (18 years and above)
Event Length	1-2 days (10 years and above) 1 week (11 years and above) 2 weeks (18 years and above)
Examples	Knockout with consolation - Link Davis Cup – Link ITF Junior Tour - Link

5. BALLS AND COURTS - Explained

RED



BALLS
Foam or felt
75% slower than full ball

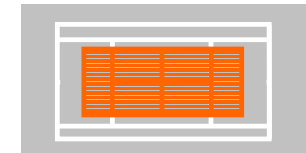


COURTS
11m x 6m
Net Height: 80cm

ORANGE



BALLS
Felt
50% slower than full ball

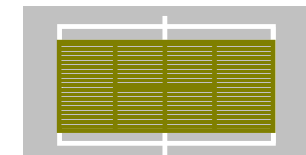


COURTS
18m x 6.5-8.23m
Net Height: 80-91cm

GREEN



BALLS
Felt
25% slower than full ball

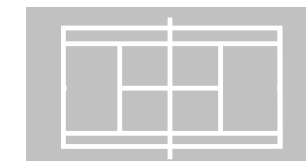


COURTS
Normal full size
court

YELLOW



BALLS
Full normal yellow ball



COURTS
Normal full size
court

IMPLEMENTING A COMPETITIVE FRAMEWORK

Here is a guide to introducing your own competitive framework. On pages 7-9 there are blank templates that you can use to design your own competitive framework. You may prefer to design your own style however these templates may help to think about how you might want to structure competition in your region.

1) CONSULT

Before creating a framework, it is important to consult and discuss ideas with key people in the following groups: 'Players', 'Coaches', 'Parents', 'Administrators', 'Competition Organisers' and 'Officials'. A competitive framework will affect all these groups so try to get feedback on your ideas for a framework and try to find out their ideas.

2) CREATE A DRAFT FRAMEWORK

Use the sample and template frameworks in this document to think about how your framework might look. Your framework will need the following information:

- Ages (eg, 8 and under, 9 and under, 14 and under, adult)
- Type of ball and court size (eg orange ball and court for 9 and unders)
- Location (where players of a given age and ability should play, eg in the club, regional, national)
- Format/Level (types of event that each age and ability group can play, eg round-robin with short sets for 10 and unders)

Your framework needs to incorporate and make clear all of the above but should also consider any additional equipment that might be required (especially the slower balls, mini tennis nets and lines for marking courts), if this equipment is not available or affordable within your nation then you should consider whether it must be required for your framework.

3) CONSULT AGAIN

Once the draft framework has been drawn up, consult again with people from those important groups to gain any feedback.

4) RATINGS AND RANKINGS

You may have a current ranking and rating system in place, however if you do not then it is crucial to have a ratings system to create a healthy competitive environment. Ratings systems enable players of all abilities to find events and players who are of a similar standard, preventing players being matched against someone too good or too poor for their ability.

The International Tennis Number (ITN) is available for all nations who wish to implement a ready-made ratings system. For more information visit www.itftennis.com/itn. A national rankings system can also be implemented alongside a ratings system for all players or for those playing events outside of club level.

5) FINALISE FRAMEWORK AND PRODUCE

Make any final changes to the framework and produce a finished, printed document. This should include:

- The framework and levels
- Explanation of the framework and reasons for using slower balls and smaller courts
- Timeline for when the competition framework will come into effect (giving coaches and competition organisers time to finish running current events and implement new events)

Distribute the framework among all those players, parents, coaches, administrators, competition organisers and officials for whom you have contact details.

6) PROMOTE AND EDUCATE

Promote and explain the framework at coach's conferences, meetings and courses. Visit tournaments and explain it to players and parents. Hold special forums or workshops in order to promote the framework to coaches, competition organisers, officials, players and parents. Promote www.tennisplayandstay.com as it will provide international support for the use of slower balls and smaller courts as part of a competitive framework.

Coaches, competition organisers and officials can be given training to raise awareness of the different varieties of multi-match formats available (see www.tennisplayandstay.com/competition) and give experience of how to run the appropriate event for the standard, age and requirements of the players they have (see sample competition framework and competition levels).

7) ARRANGE EVENTS WITHIN THE NEW FRAMEWORK

Arrange tournaments to show how the new framework can be implemented, especially when using the slower red, orange and green balls as well as smaller courts. This will help to provide an example to coaches and competition organisers of how the events can be run.

8) ENFORCE AND EVALUATE

Enforce the framework so that, as far as possible, all tennis competition played at all levels fits within the competitive framework (especially with reference to using slower balls and smaller courts with younger players).

After one year, evaluate the success of the framework and make any changes that may be necessary