



## **Starting a Middle School Tennis League** <An After School Sports Club Model>

**Finding a Coordinator:** The league coordinator is key to the success of an after school tennis league. The coordinator must identify the prospective schools and coaches, then market the program to the potential schools. This person should have great organizational skills as well as people skills, and be flexible and creative enough to make format changes at the last minute. This individual could be affiliated with the school system or may be an employee or volunteer with the local Community Tennis Association or District Tennis Association.

**Identifying your Coaches:** Coaches can be found anywhere and everywhere! Parents, PE teachers, HS coaches, and league tennis players that just love to share the game are the ideal coaches for this league. Make a contact list so that coaches can contact each other during the season as well as after the season. Many coaches work with their players in the off-season if they have the time.

**Identifying your Season:** The tennis season time and length varies depending on location. Considerations are weather, school terms, tennis court locations and availability, and conflicts with other extra-curricular activities and sports such as high school tennis, soccer and basketball.

**Identifying the Facilities:** Identify all public and private tennis courts/facilities located nearby the potential schools. Determine who owns the courts and contact them for permission to use the courts. Insurance is available through the USTA to cover all sites to be used for the league, whether public or private. If the league is run under the auspices of the District or Sectional Association, the league is covered by USTA insurance and the facilities may be provided with Certificates of Insurance.

**Contacts with the Schools:** Invite both public and private schools. Since this league may be, but need not be a "sanctioned" interscholastic league, you may include all schools and children, including charter schools and home schooled children. Visit with the school district's administration office, athletic department and/or the community relations person. Obtain permission to distribute flyers and information to students on campus.

Check to see if the proposed league can be a school sponsored and funded event---either through the governing body for interscholastic and extracurricular activities or simply as an after school sports club connected with the school. Also consider contacting the principals of the schools that you would like to include in the league. Send the principals a letter explaining your program and inviting their schools to participate.

**Funding and Fees:** Participant fees sufficient to support the costs of the league should be projected and charged. Costs associated with running the league will include the stipend of the coordinator if not supported by the school system or by the District, Section or CTA, expenses related to the year-end tournament (trophies and tournament t-shirts for the champions, refreshments, printing and supplies, etc.).

Each coach then would want to add the projected team expenses for the season, including

match balls, refreshments, team t-shirts, transportation, court fees, and any salary or stipends for coaches and assistants (if they are not volunteers). Some funding for school teams may be found in USTA Intramural/Interscholastic grants or through USTA Section foundations. Student fundraising efforts should also be utilized similar to other youth sports (e.g. car washes, bake sales, tennis fundraising events/ tournaments, etc).

**Recreational Coaches' Workshops and Coaching Tips:** Plan and organize a Recreational Coaches Workshop in your area to support your coaches and train them in handling large groups of diverse levels of players. Implement a play based approach for beginners by utilizing transition balls and modified serving if necessary. Contact your Local Community Tennis Coordinator or your Section's Schools Coordinator for more information. That information can be found through [www.usta.com](http://www.usta.com) .

**The League:** Be flexible in your programming and tailor the match format to your situation, taking into consideration the number of courts available for practices and matches, the size of the schools, and the likelihood you will have a balance of girls and boys participating. Match players against players of comparable skills by providing divisions similar to those used in high school tennis such as Varsity, Junior Varsity and C team divisions. Start small with six to ten teams, if that is what works for your first season. Don't worry - it will grow each year!! A possible format for a 6 court facility and 12-24 players on a team fairly evenly balanced between girls and boys is to play three boys' singles and doubles and three girls' singles and doubles. This format can be played with as few as 12 and as many as 18 (9 boys and 9 girls). A modified format (Coed Mix & Match Division) may be used with six singles and 3 doubles played according to strength, with any combination of girls and boys. This format can be played with as few as 6 and as many as 12. For after school we suggest a match format of one set, no-ad scoring, with a set (twelve point) tiebreaker at six games all.

**USTA Junior Team Tennis** formats, found at [www.usta.com](http://www.usta.com), can also be utilized as can TennisLink, the USTA's league registration system. If possible, advance all teams to the year-end tournament to provide these young players with an additional opportunity for competition. Season standings may be used to determine tournament flights and seeding.

**High School No Cut Programs and JV Leagues:** Now that you have started a successful Middle School League, consider whether you may want to develop a High School No Cut Program or JV League. The same principles used for middle school inter school play can be applied to the development of a Junior Varsity League for players that don't make their schools' varsity teams. You can utilize the middle school formats for a JV or School Club program or you can simply mirror your local high school tennis formats as to gender, team size and season. For example, if the girls play in the fall and the boys in the spring, develop another division for the girls in the fall and the boys in the spring, allowing these JV or C Team players an opportunity to be a part of their high school programs. Increased participation at the Middle School level means there will be increased participation at the High School Level. Have FUN!!

**Who to Contact for More Information:** League materials including score sheets and model practices may be found at:

<http://www.southwest.usta.com/juniorsprograms/custom.sps?iType=5765&icustompageid=8369>

If you want more information on starting a Middle School Tennis League contact your sectional USTA School Tennis Coordinator.