



BUILDING A COMPETATIVE HIGH SCHOOL TEAM

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County/district school rules and private school rules can differ greatly when it comes to hiring high school coaches. If you are like a lot of high school coaches throughout the country, you were probably “volunteered” by your AD or principal – because you were the new kid on the block. Like many rookie AND some veteran coaches you probably have had little formal instruction on how to coach.

Welcome to the coaching ranks!! You will find it very rewarding as well as very frustrating. You will want to tear your hair out – or maybe your player’s hair – or perhaps even the player’s parents hair.

You will need traditional coaching tools: racquets, balls, ball hoppers, tennis shoes, and a clipboard. BUT to be a successful coach you’ll need five other tools that cannot be bought. These tools are available only through self-examination and hard work: they are easy to remember with the acronym **COACH** (borrowed from the USTA – Rookie Coaches Tennis Guide, 1991).

- C Comprehension** – know the rules, know drills to improve skills and tactics
- O Outlook** – your goals as a coach, your priorities, your vision, your philosophy, how you rate fun, development, winning
- A Affection** – genuine concern for the young people you coach
- C Character** – they learn by watching, are you a good role model?
- H Humor** – laugh at yourself and laugh WITH your players during practices and matches. Nothing helps balance the tone of a serious practice like a good laugh or two. Allow your players and yourself to enjoy the “ups” and don’t dwell on the downs

No matter where you are in your season, communication is a key element. Verbal and non-verbal cues can be misread and misunderstood by anyone especially high school kids.

- Be positive, but honest
- Speak clearly and explain as best you can, don’t be afraid to repeat what you said
- Facial expressions are the quickest way to figure out what someone thinks or feels
- Body language is the next easiest way
- Effective communication is a two-way street, just as in tennis – you need sending and receiving skills

Pre-season (before the FHSAA official practice start date)

- A. Establish a philosophy based on:
 1. Your schools attitude and support of the program
 2. Your personal attitude – ideally combine all three of the following
 - a. Fun
 - b. Developing players as people
 - c. Winning – how important is it to you, the players, and the school?
 3. “Athletes first, Winning Second”. This motto recognizes that striving to win is an important, even vital part of tennis. But it emphatically states that no-efforts in striving to win should be made at the expense of a player’s well-being, development, and enjoyment.
- B. Finding players
 1. Large schools, bigger cities – tennis town – usually not many problems
 2. Small schools – usually a more rural area – you will probably be asked to be the catalyst in implementing local summer programs or after school programs.
 - a. Scout local parks in the summer for younger kids
 - b. Look for the athletes on other teams who need a spring sport (soccer, basketball)
 - c. Develop a “farm system” with the local middle school
 - d. Form a junior varsity program.
- C. Pre-season meeting
 1. Set a time to meet with the prospective players AND their parents

In-season

- A. Try-outs. Try to support a no-cut program if you can. Some players will choose to cut themselves. If they chose to stay, be honest with them about the possibilities of limited, if any matches. Figure out a way to work with the less talented players, you never know when you may need their services. These players can be a great support system.
 1. Decide how to run try-outs
 - a. Simple round robin
 - b. Flighted round robin
 - c. Ladders
 2. Do former top players need to go through the whole try-out procedure?
 3. If at a school that has a combined middle school, how do you handle a talented middle school player?

- B Line-ups – Do you allow challenge matches? How far into the season do you allow players to challenge?
1. Selection – will you allow:
 - a. Singles only players?
 - b. Doubles only players?
 2. Order
 - a. FHSAA rules state no stacking
 3. Special cases
 - a. Some seasons overlap a bit (usually during the try-out period) – how do you handle that?
 - b. Outstanding player
 1. How to handle – on-court
 2. Practices – do OR should they come to some or all practices?
 3. How can a private coach be of help?
- C. Building Team Spirit
1. Limit internal competition to avoid match burn-out before the “in-season” matches start.
 2. Treat all players equally and with equal respect.
 3. Make clear, fair rules, and enforce them. Communicate. Let players know what’s going on, make exceptions clear. Let them have input on team rules.
 4. Set goals as a player and a team, keep them realistic.
 - a. Individual
 1. Short term – work on fitness, serve and volley on the 1st serve, etc (whatever they need to improve).
 2. Longer term – win a set, win a match, have a winning record,
 - b. Team
 1. Short term – work together more, beat a rival
 2. Long term – win districts, regionals, go to state
 5. Repeat goals regularly
 6. Develop a team ritual
 7. Do things as a team – have fun off-court
 - a. Compete in other activities as a team
 - b. Challenge another team to an activity
 - c. Picnics/team dinner after a match
 8. Players should watch teammates , cheer them on, chart a match
 9. End practices with a fun team drill – add music to practice
- D. Sportsmanship and on-court behavior
1. Sportsmanship is more than just good behavior on court. It’s an attitude about competition and tennis in general
 2. Make it clear to players what is appropriate and what will be tolerated. Coaches who are confident about what they expect from their players; who establish clear and consistent rules, and who enforce them (even when it means losing matches) will gain the respect of their players.
- E. Planning practices/matches - you don’t need 101 different practice routines. Have a few that emphasize different areas of the game and rotate them. Use a calendar with the practice/match schedule already listed. Give it to the players on a weekly basis.
1. Practices should be well planned, efficient and FUN
 2. Plan for rain – check with others to see what facilities are available to use
 3. Practice plans that fit your philosophy, players, and facilities
 4. Play as many matches as are allowed by FHSAA
 5. Schedule by thirds (1/3 easy win, 1/3 difficult, 1/3 could go either way)
 6. Before the match – call the opposing coach, check on transportation, make your line-up
 7. After the match – report scores to school officials, call/email the results to the local paper

Post – season

- A. Help players set goals for the summer or next season
- B. Help players plan for college, discuss the following (at a minimum)
 1. Academics – the better the grades, the more opportunities will be available
 2. Attitude – usually one of the first things a coach considers
 3. Athletics – where a player might honestly fit in on a team
 4. Coach-ability – coaches don’t want to deal with “bad actors”
 5. Self-discipline – keeping up with academics and the season schedule
 6. Interviews – help them prepare - questions to ask
 7. Parents – how they can help their child