

## ***The use of Low compression Balls in the Development of High Performance Players***

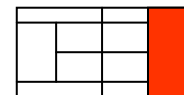
By Steven Martens and Max De Vylder

Too often the low compression ball has been considered as an alternative for the recreational player. Surely the less gifted player at a young age will benefit from this ball, developing far better consistency during rallying, which enhances the “fun” element of the game.

However on top of that we are convinced the use of this low compression ball, together with other adaptations (smaller courts and rackets) is key in the development of young talented players.

The differences in ball trajectory (slower, lower bounce) will facilitate the development of a wider range of shots and appropriate tactical decision making.

A brief overview:



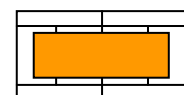
### **Red “discovery stage” for 6-7 year olds**

Having gone through the initial basic learning stage and by staying long enough on this court, the more skilful kids will master the whole court. They will be able to change the direction and height of the ball, come to the net, and maintain stability during running and hitting.

The small rackets (23inch) will allow a consistent contact with the light ball.

Tactically the player will be put in situations where he has to stay in control of the court and ball, attack or defend quickly, pick up information and react accordingly.

Some of the physical qualities as agility, adapting to different trajectories and positions in the court, rhythm...will be developed.



### **Orange “total tennis” for 8-9 year olds**

The best players are able to develop the full technical spectrum at this stage.

The length of the court forces the attacking player to be accurate, use topspin. It allows the approach to the net and the development of the net game. As a consequence counter attack will be more than just playing defensive lobs; short angled passing shots, aggressive drives, topspin lobs will appear.

The width of the court will necessitate the use of spin to produce angles, to be precise in attacking and volleying. It also helps players in defence to cover some ground and not to be completely out of balance.

Due to the height of the net (80cm) and a full service box, even kids can create an advantage with their serves. The technical quality of the serve is favoured when using the right racket size (25inch). Flat and sliced serves will be predominantly visible.

The lower bounce and lighter rackets will also prevent extreme grips in the groundstrokes.

The use of a one handed backhand topspin (and also slice and volley) will be facilitated.

Overall we observe that talented players display here the same technical/tactical adaptations as the pros on a full court!!

### **Green “transitional stage 1” for 10 year olds**



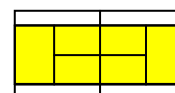
Even advanced players are now facing a difficult time. Playing forward, coming to the net, using the serve as a weapon...it all becomes a lot more difficult. The court dimensions, the height of the net don't favour total tennis.

Coaches should emphasise an advanced court positioning (around the baseline), taking the ball on the rise (contact between hips and shoulders will prevent extreme grips), and enough weight transfer into the shots (to prevent high loopy trajectories). By doing so, it will be possible to preserve an offensive and constructive attitude and to play at a higher tempo. The use of the transition ball will favour this philosophy.

Using a 26inch racket is another key element in “preserving” the technical/tactical level. Too heavy or long rackets at this stage often create technical problems on serve, groundstrokes and volleys, due to inertia.

Doubles on the green court are played on a full singles court. Research has shown that this allows and stimulates a more active participation of the net players and an easier coverage of the net all together: another element in the development of a wider range of shots and tactical options. This compensates the difficulties in mastering the fore court in singles at this stage. We therefore advise the organisation of team competitions including doubles for this age group.

### **Yellow “transitional stage 2” for 11 year olds**



Once the players become more proficient, they can now move on to a full ball. The same principles for the green ball (advanced court positioning, playing on the rise...) will need to be addressed here as well. The heavier ball will create a bigger shock at impact. This necessitates sufficient forearm action, grip strength and an appropriate racket (both in size and weight) in relation to the physical capacities of the players. Taller and/or stronger players are able to use a 27 inch racket.

It mostly takes 2 to 3 more years before the total tennis of the orange court becomes feasible again.

So, no need to rush through the different stages. They all have large benefits when staying in there for a while.