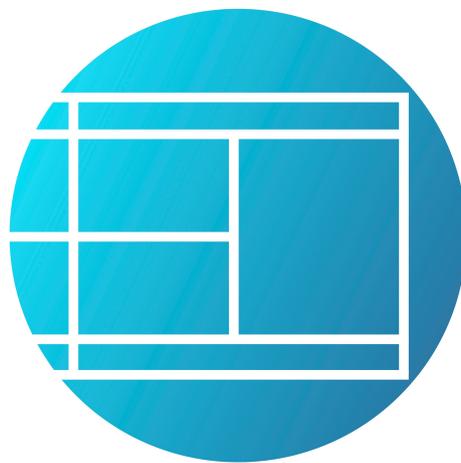


Universal Tennis Curriculum

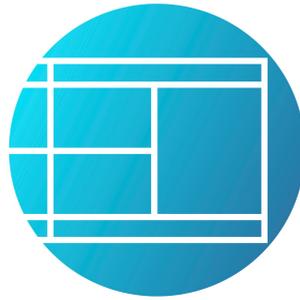
Developed by current and former top level players and coaches with the objective of advancing the beginner player to be a highly competitive tournament player.



FOURCOACH



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FOURCOACH

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Is this curriculum going to help you?

Q:

1. Do you and your fellow coaches have a lesson plan for each lesson?
2. Are you able to have individual goals and markers when coaching a group lesson?
3. Do your lessons have the same structure, every time?
4. Do you give your students and parents feedback regularly?
5. If a new coach started tomorrow, would they know what each student could and couldn't do?
6. Is the life of a student at your centre less than two years?
7. Do students reach a point where they need a 'better' coach to help them continue to develop?
8. Do you consider the standard of the competitions you run to be strong?
9. Do many of your students play and have success in local, state and national tournaments?
10. Do you forecast generational loyalty to your tennis centre?

A:

- The FourCoach team traveled around the state and the country for close to two years, observing various coaches and their programs. Alarming, almost all of the coaches observed did not engage in any formative (ongoing observational) or summative (end of term/month/year) assessments for their students. Additionally, these same coaches observed ran almost identical lesson structures for group and private coaching apart. While a very large proportion of coaches and centres had high levels of enthusiasm and passion for the game, and while many had formal coaching qualifications, many were experiencing student turnover of less than 18 months. Also of note was that a small percentage of coaches were holding onto (and developing) elite players almost exclusively, and the large majority of coaches had students experiencing little success or even exposure to wider and higher levels of competition. For many, the greatest levels of player engagement were seen during informal games played within coaching lessons and while these were fun and developmental, they weren't doing a great deal to individualise tuition or get players to the higher stages of performance. Only a very small handful of coaches nation-wide actually started a lesson with a series of individual goals and targets for players along with the drills, activities and games that would help them achieve.



Is this guide going to help you?

- Most coaches see group lessons as a way for students to develop a love for the game through social interactions and games. They are a highly engaging, yet affordable and manageable way for new players to try the game out and to learn the basics. None of this ever needs to change, however it was the viewpoint of many coaches interviewed that time constraints and class management were the biggest hurdles to having individual learning needs met during group lessons. The most effective group lesson structures observed were those where grouping was flexible and timetabled to be convenient. Groups were loosely organised with age in mind but the more defining features of group composition were development focus, skill level, experience and cans/can'ts.
- For most coaches, the long-held paradigm is that students should turn up to every lesson and receive exposure to all of the general shots in the game until the lesson is over. Coaches learn to understand the little aspects of each shot that players need to work on, eg 'Sally needs to turn her shoulders more in preparation for her backhand', and 'Zhang needs to shorten his backswing on his forehand volley'. These mental observations generally stay at the forefront of that particular coach's mind. But there is a growing need to see each player as an individual who favours various aspects of his/her game and needs further development on other aspects. Remaining rigid to a set format where all shots have the same amount of time and focus can result in a growing disparity between stronger and weaker shots as well as possible disengagement.
- Not all students and parents are the same. Some students and parents will enrol in tennis programs just in the name of a bit of fun. Some parents just want a bit of time to sit and unwind. But for many parents, there is a definite need to see tangible results or some measure of progress in return for dollars spent. Most people are relatively understanding of the fact that player development happens at different speeds, but as a way of promoting loyalty and longer engagement in programs, getting into a habit of communicating what players have achieved and what they're working towards achieving next is incredibly beneficial for business.
- Almost all coaches interviewed and observed were able to articulate areas of strength and weakness in the players they trained. Going one step further and having a quick and straight-forward way to keep track of player development would result in better communication amongst coaches and a better understanding of areas of improvement for the whole tennis centre.



Is this guide going to help you?

- Students can come and go and there aren't many recognisable indicators as to how long they'll stay with you, their coach. For some, tennis is taken up with the expectation to become masters very quickly. When that goal isn't realised for whatever reason, players often leave the game and take up another sport or hobby. For others, tennis is tied to happiness. As a student engaged in lessons that are fun, they'll do well. But many burn-out stories will show that when a player starts to have success, motivation to play is then tied to whether or not they're winning. For a player with glaring holes in their game, or for someone who had some quick successes without following a natural progression, it will be easy to meet many physical and mental barriers. As a coach but also a business owner, it is important to help every player reach their goals and their potential but also to ensure that players continue to come back to your centre, whether it be for coaching or to play in your competitions and tournaments. Adhering to a straight-forward curriculum that ensures that players don't develop while some skills remain stagnant can be engaging and ensure players stay in the game for longer.
- If you spend a great deal of time progressing a player from beginner level through to playing in competitions with barrier weaknesses, it's natural that they may feel they need to look elsewhere to address those inconsistencies with another coach. That is not good for business and that is not good for players. The FourCoach curriculum is staged in such a way that players should achieve particular levels of competency and mastery before moving into competitions and tournaments. Each stage needs all aspects to be achieved before progressing and this ensures that certain shots, tactics, mental processes and movements aren't overlooked or abandoned along the way.
- A great way to keep students engaged at your centre is by running regular competitions that are challenging but also have attainable achievements. Having one-dimensional competitions with tired formats or competitions with a very wide variance of player ability is a quick way to see players dropping out. The better players won't feel challenged and the players with lots of weaknesses won't be improving from getting wiped off the court. Having several different tiers and flexible format competitions is the best way to continue to develop your players as well as seeing them remain loyal and playing at your centre.



Is this guide going to help you?

- At nearly all of the centres we visited, coaches would be able to list a very small handful of players who were competing at high levels with success. The large majority of players at their centres were fumbling their way through local competitions and turning up to coaching to 'go through the motions'. The FourCoach curriculum is staged in such a way that a player must demonstrate certain competencies as well as a tangible win/loss ratio to be encouraged into the more challenging competitions and tournaments.
- Generational loyalty to a centre is the ultimate goal for a business owner. Seeing a student go from being a beginner through to being a complete player and then either referring a friend, family member or even offspring is incredibly rewarding. Having attainable goals, an easy to understand progressive curriculum, individual lesson focuses, communication with players and families and good levels of communication amongst different coaches at the same centre will all contribute to positive word of mouth and repeat business.



PREFACE

- * The FourCoach curriculum is set into six stages intentionally. It is paramount that a player achieves competency in each skill, movement and tactic within a stage before moving into the next stage. Player reports and coach lesson plans for a player should not have a mixture of different goals from a variety of stages.
- * 'Starting Out' is the first stage, followed by 'Putting it into Practice'. The rationale for this is that a player who has just picked up a racquet without question should adhere to a set of criteria before getting the most out of drills and games that involve tennis shots. This curriculum recognises that letting a player find their own way is one strategy that garners results, but that correct teaching of technique and movement from the beginning removes the likelihood of having to 'unlearn' poor habits and muscle memory as the player develops.
- * 'Learning About Doubles' (stage three) comes before 'Ready for Competition' (stage four) in the FourCoach curriculum because doubles has a number of different strategies and wide variance on commonly drilled shots. It is a largely different game contextually (at least it should be) to singles and subjectively more important to learn about its facets before moving into standardised competitions.
- * 'Rising Through the Ranks' (stage five) slots between 'Ready for Competition' (stage four) and 'Taking on the Tournaments' (stage six) because it is imperative that players achieve particular outcomes and experience certain levels of success before moving into the 'lose and you're out' format of most tournaments. Players should be fine-tuning their ability within local competitions before taking on tournaments. For some players, achieving the outcomes in 'Rising Through the Ranks' won't take long at all, while other players may take several months or even years to reach a point where they can confidently enter tournaments and aim to achieve a level of success that will ensure their confidence continues to grow.
- * The coach shall be the one who is responsible for the teaching and improvement of technique. The coach shall be the one who determines the best drills and games to use.
- * Every outcome and progression within the FourCoach curriculum comes from an educated and experienced tennis perspective, however it does not purport to be the only possible linear progression for a tennis player to adhere to. We do believe the curriculum to be the best possible development program in existence however we respect the many varied opinions of best practice that exist within the global tennis community.

STAGE ONE - OUTCOMES

Starting Out

SKILLS

'Hockeys' the ball

Notes & Clarification

Hockeying the ball is a measure of the basis of hand-eye co-ordination. Basic skill in this area would be 'golf-putting' the ball around the entire court, while a higher level of ability would be for a student to hockey the ball along the length of the sideline from the baseline to the net.

'Balloons' the ball

Ballooning the ball is a measure of higher hand-eye co-ordination, balance and control. Basic skill in this area would be bouncing the ball on the strings, up and down at about 30-40cm (12in), while a higher level of ability would be for a student to complete the same skill but alternating the side of the strings on each bounce.

Shadows technique to learn

This concept is essentially the breakdown of a stroke into several parts that can be shadowed or mirrored with the coach to create muscle memory and an awareness of each part of the body and weight distribution through the stroke, eg. a forehand consists of (1) ready position, (2) racquet back to start a figure-8, (3) stepping forward onto the front foot as the racquet continues through the 8, starting low, rising to (4) impact and continuing up (5) over the opposing shoulder.

Middle of strings -

- * forehand;
- * backhand;
- * volleys;
- * serve

At this beginning stage, the focus is hand-eye co-ordination and the persistent practice of the origins of good technique. Striking the ball on the strings at this stage is of higher importance than landing the ball into designated areas of the court. This should be a goal that comes after good timing and then getting the ball over the net.

Serve into box - from the service line

Many students make it a long way into their learning with minimal control or consistency in their serve which is quite vital in progressing into competition tennis. This assessment has been categorised as crucial for passing stage one as the timing, technique, weight transfer and challenging component of ball toss are all contrasting to the other strokes.

STAGE ONE - OUTCOMES

Starting Out

MOVEMENT

Can sprint forwards	Teaching points are a straight torso, still head, relaxed neck, elbows at 90 degrees, arms pump close to sides from 'hips to lips', knee drives/lifts with each stride while the back leg remains straight and pushes. Sprints should start with short, quick strides. Strides lengthen as speed and momentum increases.
Can jog backwards	In a match or game situation, the court will generally be clear behind a player, so the focus of practicing this skill is that a player looks to the appropriate spot, eg. if jogging backwards for a smash, eyes should never waver from the ball.
Sidesteps to sideline	Focus is for sidesteps to be on toes and with light-footed speed.
Split steps on command	The split step should eventually form a rhythmic part of bouncing on the balls of the feet during a rally. The player should time the landing of both feet, shoulder-width apart on a command or as an opponent feeds or strikes the ball. The split step is utilised in that as soon as the player lands, they can push off in the direction that the ball is heading.
Slides - both feet	The slide is best utilised in open stance (both sides) with the body facing the court. The outward foot does the sliding and then works to push the player back towards the middle of the court.
Split step to change direction	Ideally, the player needs to demonstrate rapid reaction time. The best way to assess the split to change direction (as opposed to the split for return of serve or mid-groundstroke rally) is to have the player running in one direction and performing the split step as the coach or opponent hits a ball in a different direction (or dropshot). The player does not need to be running at top pace because in that situation a slide would be more effective than a split step.
Slide to change direction	See above. The assessment for the slide and push to opposite or different direction is best assessed when the player is running at their top speed as it demonstrates an ability for the player to use the court surface as a tool for agility.

Continued...

STAGE ONE - OUTCOMES

Starting Out

MOVEMENT cont.

Side on stance

The elementary preparatory position for a groundstroke should be so that the shoulders face the side fence in the racquet-back phase of the stroke and that a front foot (opposite to racquet hand) steps forwards in the direction of the desired landing of the shot. Additional assessment to the side on stance is that a player places weight on the front leading foot when making contact with the ball and that balance is maintained.

Uses front foot;
Weight transfer during stroke

Refer to assessment notes above on 'side on stance'.

Weight transfer during serve

Regardless of the level of technique and timing shown in the serve at this stage, it is important that one of the first aspects ingrained is balance and its influence in a player following the serve through into the court with forward momentum.

STAGE ONE - OUTCOMES

Starting Out

TACTICS

Overview

At this stage of development, a player can only be assessed and advanced once they've demonstrated an ability to listen and follow instructions, reliably enter a 'ready position' before each rally, show an understanding and application of correct scoring formats, engage in good social interactions and score fairly with good communication to an opponent. While these areas have less to do with technique, movement and an understanding of the game, they are crucial in terms of developing the correct mindset to progress through the more advanced stages.

STAGE TWO - OUTCOMES

Putting it into Practice

SKILLS

Forehands - 20 into play from feed;
 Backhands - 20 into play from feed;
 Volleys - 20 into play from feed;
 Serves - 10 into play in a row

The assessment criteria of a 'forehand' and other strokes listed here in stage two is less about flawless technique, and more about generally being able to land these shots into the court, consistently. Hand-eye coordination should be demonstrated, combined with consistent striking in the middle of the strings as assessed in stage one. Assessment should take place as a feed to a player waiting mid-baseline but that is not to say that coaches cannot work with students on shots on the run. While correct stance and weight transfer are important and were assessed in stage one, a player can still be considered as achieving these outcomes as long as they reach the goals of number of shots landed in play in a row.

Slice backhand for recovery

Like all aspects of the game listed in this curriculum, it is the coach who ultimately directs the development of correct technique. Assessment of this shot however should acknowledge the type of bounce of the ball in the court. A correct slice backhand will land in the court and continue to move through the court at the same pace at a low level after the bounce. A shot that has 'backspin' will see the ball bounce and pull up, lose pace and/or bounce higher than the trajectory it arrived in. This shot should not be assessed as a correct slice backhand. Additionally, the slice for recovery should be assessed using a feed to a corner that a player must move to, as opposed to feeding the ball to a stationary player mid-baseline.

Slice backhand for net approach

Like all aspects of the game listed in this curriculum, it is the coach who ultimately directs the development of correct technique. The slice for net approach should be assessed using a short court feed that a player must move forward to. The slice backhand should remain low and maintain speed as it bounces through and the key objective is to assess a player's ability to place it deep into a corner.

Lob over stationary player

Like all aspects of the game listed in this curriculum, it is the coach who ultimately directs the development of correct technique. The lob can be both a defensive and an offensive shot, played off both sides. A flat, slice or under-spin shot would be considered a defensive lob generally. A lob with heavy topspin that bounces and shoots forward would be considered an offensive shot. A coach should assess a number of lob styles in a player's repertoire, but focus primarily on the ability to lift it over an opponent's up-stretched racquet and to land it deep into the court, beyond the service line.

Continued...

STAGE TWO - OUTCOMES

Putting it into Practice

SKILLS cont.

Effective dropshot using slice

Like all aspects of the game listed in this curriculum, it is the coach who ultimately directs the development of correct technique. The dropshot should generally not incorporate topspin. The slice used in the dropshot should be more closely identified by under-spin - this means that the ball will lose momentum and bounce more vertically upon landing, as opposed to a regular slice ball where the ball continues through the court at the same pace upon landing. A coach should assess a player's ability to land the ball shallow into a service box and oversee that this should be generally played off a short feed as opposed to off a ball that lands deep and close to the player.

Effective dropshot - volley

Like all aspects of the game listed in this curriculum, it is the coach who ultimately directs the development of correct technique. The assessed volley dropshot should incorporate slice/underspin that removes pace from the opponent's shot. Practice should focus on the 'dink volley' (a dropshot hit forwards into the court) and the angled volley that bounces towards the side fence.

Return - cross court 10 in a row;
Return - down middle 10 in a row;
Returns - down the line 10 in a row

A good return of serve should incorporate a well-timed split step, rapid decision making to move left/right, a shorter backswing for faster serves and of course, the ability to place the return cross court, to the middle of the court and over the highest part of the net down the line.

Incorporates smash at net

Best assessed as a shot after two volleys to demonstrate the understanding that there is a different technique required for a smash.

Open stance on forehand

Like all aspects of the game listed in this curriculum, it is the coach who ultimately directs the development of correct technique.

STAGE TWO - OUTCOMES

Putting it into Practice

MOVEMENT

Sprints forwards with slide	This movement will most likely be used by the player who runs forward to a dropshot and immediately needs to push off to chase a lob.
Jogs (using side-steps) backwards to smash	Teaching points are keeping eyes on the ball, and taking side-steps in a backward direction to ensure good preparation. A very effective assessment for ensuring perfect positioning is to see if the player can get underneath the ball so that it bounces on the top of their head.
Sidestep to each sideline with slide	While this skill will not often be used in general play, it is an important skill to have in order to have a higher range of adaptability on various surfaces.
Split step timed to opponent's stroke	The split step should generally be incorporated throughout an entire rally. A player should land in shoulder-width stance on the balls of their feet. The landing should be timed to the opponent's strike of the ball with an immediate push off in the direction of the incoming ball.
Split step to change direction	While this skill will not often be used in general play, it is an important skill to have in order to have a higher range of adaptability on various surfaces.
Retrieves dropshot from standing start	The player should utilise the teaching points of a sprint, particularly the ability to take smaller steps until momentum is built and then larger steps are taken. This should be assessed with the player's ability to not only sprint quickly but to also play a recovery pick-up shot off a drop-shot feed.
Retrieves dropshot from direction change	This skill should be assessed by getting the player to run in one direction and feeding a dropshot in the opposite direction. This will encourage the player to incorporate a pivot, slide or split step to change direction and move to rapid sprint.
Weight transfer using open stance - forehand	With the introduction of the open stance forehand, a player should be able to use the outside foot (same foot as stroke hand) to place weight and drive through the shot as opposed to leaning weight onto a front foot in side-stance.
Weight transfer during serve	Like all aspects of the game listed in this curriculum, it is the coach who ultimately directs the development of correct technique. The player should be bending knees in the ball-toss and driving forwards while pushing off the ground to meet the serve at a high point of impact. The player should land at least their front foot in the court area and their weight should be moving in the direction of the aim of the serve.

STAGE TWO - OUTCOMES

Putting it into Practice

TACTICS

Can identify an opponent's weakness	The player should be able to verbally articulate which aspects of an opponents game are considered weaker, eg. speed, backhand, second serve etc.
Can identify an opponent's strength	The player should be able to verbally articulate which aspects of an opponents game are considered stronger, eg. serve, forehand, consistency etc.
Can identify own weakness/es / strength/s	As above but with a reflective focus on own ability.
Can articulate a game plan	The assessment should not be based on whether or not a player can adhere to a game plan but whether they can formulate and articulate one. They should be assessed on their ability to combine identification of opponent and own strengths and weaknesses. The game plan should have a general focus, eg. stay in rallies and wait for mistake or wait for the right ball to attack; and the game plan should also have more specific strategies such as give the opponent high-bouncing topspin shots to force them into playing high backhands which is one of their weaker shots.
Demonstrates three 'gears' of play	Assessments should be organised so that players can demonstrate that they can adapt to different modes of play, eg. consistency, finding opportunities to come to the net, running around a shot to hit a favourite shot, changes in spin and so on.
Rallies consistently	Appropriate assessment at this stage can be rallying with either the coach or an opponent.
Can score an advantage tie-break	

STAGE THREE - OUTCOMES

Learning About Doubles

SKILLS

Serve into play, follows to net;
 Serve into play, makes first volley,
 regularly

A coach should not only assess a player's ability to follow their serve to the net, but also to tactically have good net coverage, eg. a player that serves out wide should position themselves closer to the sideline to protect the down the line (faster) return of serve. Additionally, the first volley for a serve-volley player will more often be played down low with knees bent. Drills and assessments should reflect this.

Serve into play - out wide, 10 in a row;
 Serve into play - body, 10 in a row;
 Serve into play - tee, 10 in a row;
 Flat serve, 10 in a row;
 Slice serve, 10 in a row;
 Topspin/kick serve, 10 in a row;
 Volley both sides, shoulder height, 10
 in a row;
 Volley both sides, waist height, 10 in a
 row;
 Volley both sides, bent low, 10 in a row

Notes for flat, slice and topspin serves are (a) the ability for a player to alter their ball toss and grip to achieve the desired strike and spin onto the serve; and (b) of a higher degree of difficulty, being able to achieve similar results without altering the ball toss in order to prevent an opponent from anticipating what serve will be hit.

Volley as a lob into 4m cone radius, 5
 in a row

This should be most effective when both opposing doubles players are at the net. It comes with risk, however it is a great offensive play.

Returns serve with topspin, dropped
 at feet

This is the most commonly used return of serve against a player who serves and volleys. There are several aspects to be broken down in this shot, the most challenging of which is to somewhat absorb the pace of the serve and control the speed of the return to ensure that the topspin takes effect immediately after clearing the net, dipping down to the incoming player's feet. Coaches should implement drills that test a player on a variety of serves that come at a variety of speeds and with a range of different spins.

Defensive lob as slice and topspin,
 regularly

The use of the word 'defensive' in this skill implies that the serve comes through with great speed or excellent placement and therefore puts the server in a dominant position in the rally. The returner will have less time to position their feet or will be moving left or right to retrieve a serve. Drills and assessment should reflect this.

Continued...

STAGE THREE - OUTCOMES

Learning About Doubles

SKILLS cont.

Offensive lob, slice and topspin,
regularly

Forehands - 10 in a row during rally;
Backhands - 10 in a row during rally

In contrast to the 'defensive' return above, this scenario would most likely involve a slower (or second) serve that can be attacked. A player will have more time to move their feet and will be less likely to be stretched or moving out beyond their comfort zone.

At this stage of development, a player should be able to demonstrate this level of consistency with a variety of different opponents as opposed to a coach providing relatively easy balls to return. Assessment should take place in the context of a live point or as an observation in a real match.

STAGE THREE - OUTCOMES

Learning About Doubles

MOVEMENT

Squats, lunges and vertical leaps - high proficiency

It would be suggested that play at the net requires a higher level of agility and movement due to having less time to react to shots from an opponent. Getting down low to a ball, stretching wide, stepping forwards and also laterally and vertically jumping to reach high smashes are all vital movement skills to have.

STAGE THREE - OUTCOMES

Learning About Doubles

TACTICS

Crosses for volley, switch with partner	The ability to cross and actually take the volley should be assessed in both a drill and matchplay situation. Additionally, the ability to have awareness of a partner who is crossing at the net and to cover the vacated side should be assessed via observation.
Recognises application for tandem	It is the assessment of the understanding and application of the tandem formation that is being assessed at this level. Being able to actually put it into practice in a match situation is a bonus. A player should be able to verbalise the pros, cons and best situations to use the tandem formation.
Effectively employs i-formation, tandem	As a step beyond the above assessment, a player should be able to use the i-formation/tandem tactics successfully in combination with an applied plan for the point.
Develops a doubles game plan	The assessment should not be based on whether or not a player can adhere to a game plan but whether they can formulate and articulate one. They should be assessed on their ability to combine identification of opponents' and own/partner's strengths and weaknesses.
Can identify opponents' weakness/es Can identify opponents' strength/s	Doubles is very much about tactics and communication with a partner. An integral part about mapping each point and formulating/applying a game plan is acknowledgement of all strengths and weaknesses on the court. The assessment for this should be a verbal articulation of strengths and weaknesses. The application of a successful game plan would be a bonus.
Speaks positively with partner at all times; Discusses next point tactics with partner	See above.

STAGE FOUR - OUTCOMES

Ready for Competition

SKILLS

Groundstrokes technique fine-tuned;
Volley technique fine-tuned;
Serve technique fine-tuned

This assessment is based on coach discretion. A player does not need to have flawless technique to be ready for competition but technique needs to be established well enough that 'fine-tuning' is taking place as opposed to complete learning or re-learning. Examples of fine-tuning on a forehand would be 'let's aim to strike the ball earlier and more out-front', or 'you need to position your shoulders so that they face the side fence in your preparation for side-stance' etc.

Defensive slide retrieval

This shot should be assessed as competent on both wings. The player should rapidly chase a wide ball and slide into the correct stance while simultaneously playing a defensive shot. More focus should be on a player's ability to use the slide foot to push off and recover towards the centre of the court as opposed to the shot itself.

Defensive lob

Separate to the teaching points of the defensive slide retrieval, the focus of the defensive lob is the placement in the court of the shot. It matter less about whether the shot is hit with topspin, slice or flat, but the importance of the shot having a high trajectory (to buy time) and to land deep into the opponent's court (to prevent it being attacked) are paramount. Both sides should be assessed in drill and matchplay situations.

Attacking forehand approach to corner;
Attacking backhand approach to corner

Most commonly, the coach and player should practice hitting off both wings in different stances to the backhand (or advantage) side of the court. Generally, an opponent's backhand will be the weaker of the two shots and generally, the opponent will be right-handed. Obviously, this will not always be the case so putting the ball deep and fast into both corners should be assessed. Also noteworthy is the ability of the player to hit the ball 'on the rise' or at the top of the bounce to ensure that risk on this attacking shot is minimised. A low-bouncing ball struck with force will be harder to get over the net without compromising on power or needing to apply heavy spin.

Side and open stance used interchangeably

Important: players who have learned both stances will tend to eventually favour one over the other and not necessarily have a need to use both interchangeably. It is definitely an advantage to have flexibility over using both stances however, as it increases the player's ability to be successful on different surfaces, against different opponents and in different climates. A player is not to be prevented from progressing through the stages if they do not use both.

Continued...

STAGE FOUR - OUTCOMES

Ready for Competition

SKILLS cont.

Split step consistently used on return of serve

This skill is best assessed as an observation in matchplay situations. This is a skill that needs to be automatic and done routinely, without thought being needed.

Split step consistently used throughout rally

As above.

Volleys into play when net is approached

It is important to note that not all players develop into 'net rushers'. Some players simply favour their groundstrokes above all else and will not look for opportunities to come to the net. This skill is best assessed in a drill format as opposed to a matchplay format. It is still an important skill to have in terms of player development, but for some, it won't be utilised that often.

STAGE FOUR - OUTCOMES

Ready for Competition

MOVEMENT

Consistently returns to mid-baseline in rally	This skill is best assessed as an observation in matchplay situations. This is a skill that needs to be automatic and done routinely, without thought being needed.
Anticipates, moves before opponent hits	This movement requires a deeper knowledge of the game and of technique. Assessment should be in the form of conversations with the player about what to look for as an opponent prepares for and strikes a ball, as well as observations during actual matchplay.
Weight transfer in-line with stroke direction	A way of re-wording this assessment would be that a player has balance throughout each shot, observed in a variety of different matchplay situations against opponents that have power, consistency, placement and a combination of all three. A good assessment technique would be to video a player engaged in rallies, both in dominance and under pressure, and to reflect on technique together while both watching the video back.

STAGE FOUR - OUTCOMES

Ready for Competition

TACTICS

Demonstrates positive self-talk when down	A difficult to assess asset, but one that can be identified in both reflection (post game) about what mental strategies were employed, and also in the observation of an absence of negative talk, particularly out loud for an opponent to potentially overhear.
Reflects upon performance with insight	Post-match communication should be regularly with a coach-figure. All performances should be reflected on, from identifying what was done well in a victory, what could have been done better or differently in a loss, what proved to be the difference in a tight match and what a player can plan to do against an opponent on their next meeting.
Says 'good shot' to opponent	This is not necessarily a restricting 'skill' from progressing through the stages of development but in many circles it would be something considered to be of high importance in carrying through tennis etiquette and in developing positive and respectful relationships with different players over time. Coaches should choose whether or not they prioritise drilling this habit into players.
Absorbs external pressures confidently	Observable with consideration to 'demonstrates positive self-talk' and 'reflects upon performance'. The strongest players, mentally, are those who can look at 'external pressures' (weather, injury, opponent behaviour, issues with own clothes or equipment, bad calls etc) and push through them unaffected mentally - or with increased positivity. This is another skill that cannot be assessed in one match or in one coaching lesson. It is an asset that is developed over time.

STAGE FIVE - OUTCOMES

Rising Through the Ranks

SKILLS

(DH) Backhand to open stance pivot foot

Applies to players with a double handed backhand.

The double handed backhand, like the single handed backhand is generally hit in closed side-stance, however when stretched wide a player can slide wide with open stance, strike the backhand in open stance and push back towards the middle of the court. Depending on the surface of the court, the player may choose to slide out to the backhand, or hit the backhand in closed side-stance as the body swings around to complete the shot in open stance. This would make the front foot a 'pivot foot'. The back foot then would be the push point to get back into the middle of the court.

Uses opponents power with shortened swing

Easier to assess in a drill situation with coach who feeds balls at increasing speed. The player must not only focus heavily on ensuring light footwork gets them into the correct position for the shot (with decreasing time to do so), but that they keep eyes on the ball to ensure timing off the middle of the strings. As the shots come through with greater power, the player who is in position and using good timing should be able to use their weight distribution to return the ball using the opponent's power without too much of an increase in their own swing.

Scrambles when defending to even ground

Best assessed in a matchplay situation, and a great post-match reflection if videoed. A player who has an opponent who regularly dictates and dominates play must use a variety of defensive strategies including shot placement, swing adjustment, anticipation and speed to get themselves back into an 'even' position in the point. An even position is also described as a 50/50 position where neither player particularly has the upper hand.

Regularly attacks short ball or second serve

While this is a skill that can be assessed in a drill or coaching situation, it is more valuable if it is an automated skill that requires no thought. Over a broad period of time, certain traits should be encouraged in each player, one of which is to choose the correct ball to attack. Players who experience high levels of success are generally those who can identify a shot that can be hit with high power with the least amount of risk. High bouncing, slower speed second serves are the perfect example as they land before the service line and offer a variety of safe zones to strike the ball into with great power.

Continued...

STAGE FIVE - OUTCOMES

Rising Through the Ranks

SKILLS cont.

Plans/follows through in point construction

The player who can plan a point based around their own strengths and weaknesses, their opponent's strengths and weaknesses and their experience, knowledge and anticipation of their opponent's preferred shots will be a true strategist. Assessing a player's ability can be observational but it is preferable that a player can verbally articulate a point construction/plan with a coach and then demonstrate the ability to execute with success.

Has developed at least one weapon

Absolutely crucial at this stage of development is that the player has a shot that they can consider to be a strike weapon. For many players, it is the serve or forehand, however it can be more specific, such as the kicking topspin second serve that bounces wide to a high backhand, or the slice backhand approach shot that is hit with great power and stays low, forcing an opponent to hit upwards to a net-bound player. A player that has a 'go-to' that they can construct a point around will more than likely have greater confidence and a higher potential in performing under pressure.

Anticipates an opponent attacking weakness

A player at this stage of development should have a level of insight that informs their tactics in every match. A player who is aware of their own weaknesses and constantly works to improve them will experience success. Further, a player who is aware of opponents who will try to exploit their weaknesses will be able to use this anticipation to construct points around knowing where their opponent will try to attack. To assess this skill, a coach should rely on observation in matchplay.

Counter-attacks powerful shots

This is a follow-on skill from the aforementioned 'uses opponents power with shortened swing' and 'scrambles when defending to even ground' also assessed in this stage of development. Not only should the player be demonstrating sound defensive strategies, they should also be using their speed, anticipation and technique to turn defense into attack. This skill can be assessed in a drill situation or observed in matchplay as the player runs wide (or short) to a shot in the context of an opponent dictating (having the upper hand) in a rally. A defensive shot is hit - but with the aim of counter-attacking, and the assessment takes place if it appears that the defensive player is then able to gain control and the upper hand in the rally.

Continued...

STAGE FIVE - OUTCOMES

Rising Through the Ranks

SKILLS cont.

Technique on all shots - minimal flaws

A player who still has considerable and highly noticeable flaws in their technique on certain shots should not be progressing into the highest stage of development. The best players will have the ability to exploit weaknesses and a player who knows their weakness but not how to fix it will most likely not have the confident mindset to have greater success, even if they do have excellent court movement, weapons and knowledge of the game.

STAGE FIVE - OUTCOMES

Rising Through the Ranks

MOVEMENT

Can move lightly during point on toes	This skill is best assessed as an observation in matchplay situations. This is a skill that needs to be automatic and done routinely, without thought being needed.
Uses shorter steps to improve timing	Following on from the previous related skills, a player should employ shorter steps as they get closer to the ball to ensure that the final step to the correct stance is done with balance and timing.
Speed around court considered a strength; Can maintain energy through full match	These movement skills are assessed both through observation of a player in matchplay and also through post-match/goal setting reflection conversations. It is vital that at this stage of development, a player doesn't consider their level of speed as a weakness. Additionally, the ability to have the energy to maintain fitness into the deeper stages of a match are both paramount.

STAGE FIVE - OUTCOMES

Rising Through the Ranks

TACTICS

Uses serve placement to construct point

At the early stages of development, a player might use a serve to simply start a point. At this level however, a player should see the serve as a weapon and the vital advantage of striking the first dominant blow in a rally. Opponents who can quickly get into a rhythm and routine hitting solid returns as well as anticipate where the serve will be placed will break serve with ease. The serve needs to be disguised, largely directed to an opponent's weakness, hit with different speeds and spin and first serve percentage needs to be high. To assess this, a coach can measure these aspects in lessons or observe in matchplay, particularly when a player is under pressure and also when they have the upper hand.

Uses variety to prevent opponent rhythm;

A follow on tactic from the earlier 'demonstrates three gears of play' is the ability of a player to mix up speed, placement and spin to prevent an opponent from getting into rhythm in a match. Difficult to perceive as an assessment however a coach should be aware of a player's application and tactical shift to challenge the opponent mentally and physically.

Mixes shot depth, power, spin;

Demonstrates adaptability when down

As the competition grows stronger and so do the external pressures, it is important that a player can continue to 'absorb external pressures confidently' and 'demonstrate positive self-talk when down' which are previously assessed tactical skills.

Mental toughness - maintains composure

Win/loss ratio better than 50%

This is a tangible assessment and it is subjective in nature. It is the belief of the team who have composed this curriculum that a player should have demonstrated a certain level of success in local competitions before taking on tournaments. Tournaments by their very nature are harsh realities. In most circumstances, a loss in a tournament is a goodbye to that tournament, whereas a loss in a competition round match still sees the player back at it the following round. Players need to have developed physically, mentally and to have strong technique to move into tournaments.

STAGE SIX - OUTCOMES

Taking On the Tournaments

SKILLS

- No shots considered to be a weakness It is important to clarify that one shot can be 'stronger' than another, eg. Tom's forehand is stronger than his backhand, however that doesn't imply that his backhand is weak. A player at this level can certainly have shots that they are working on improving. The ultimate goal in this stage is that a player doesn't look at his/her own forehand volley (for example) and think that it is a weak shot to be avoided. A player should be confident that they can hit all shots in the manual without fear that it will more than likely result in error.
- Passing shot accuracy - opponent at net This can be assessed in a drill situation or via observation in matchplay. Players at tournament level are more than likely going to be more attacking in nature and may look to approach the net more often. Having accuracy and making smart choices in passing (or lobbing) approach players is definitely a skill that needs to be achieved at this level.
- Can defend with slice on both sides

STAGE SIX - OUTCOMES

Taking On the Tournaments

MOVEMENT

Agility turns scrambling into counter attack

The focus for the coach is to assess whether or not a player's movement and agility is helping them to counter-attack. (Previous assessment criteria has been centred around technique).

Rarely concedes to a dropshot

An important attribute to any competitive player is the ability to show an opponent that they will fight for every point. Often, it is the chasing down of every shot that can force an opponent to take more risks and make more mistakes. Assessment should include coach observation of a number of aspects including player speed, anticipation, fitness and mental strength.

Anticipates most lobs, converts to smash

Assessment should include coach observation of a number of aspects including vertical leap, net-play technique, player speed, anticipation and fitness. It is best observed in matchplay.

STAGE SIX - OUTCOMES

Taking On the Tournaments

TACTICS

Constructs points around own strengths;

Constructs points around opponent weakness

High intensity maintained from beginning

Works for dominance in each point

Formulates game plan during hit-up

Can adapt game plan mid-match;
Focuses when down to reverse pressure

Assessment should be through observation in matchplay and also through conversation with a player before and after matchplay.

Regardless of a player's game plan, they must have the ability to demonstrate high intensity movement and mental strength from the first point. A coach will need to implement warm up strategies and observe their effectiveness to ensure that a player is ready to perform at their peak as soon as a match begins.

A player must have the awareness and ability to analyse their position in each point to ascertain whether or not they are on top. If a player is consistently scrambling or struggling to deal with an opponent's shots, they will need to employ tactics centred around their strengths and their opponent's weaknesses. It is imperative that a dominant player dictates the structure of each point.

A tournament player will come up against unfamiliar players on a regular basis. The only chance they'll get to identify an opponent's strengths and weaknesses is within a hit up, generally. A coach must assess whether or not a player spends time during the hit up testing out a variety of shots for their opponent, from seeing how they react to low forehands to high-bouncing backhands, heavy topspin and so on.

It is expected at this level that a player will go into a match with a game plan centred either around their own strengths or around their opponent's weaknesses. Verbal communication and observation will ascertain whether or not a player has adopted a game plan. It is imperative however that a player is able to abandon a game plan that is not working before allowing a match to get away from them. During-match observation and post-match reflection will allow a coach to assess this ability.

STAGE SIX - OUTCOMES

Taking On the Tournaments

IS THIS THE END?

If a player has been assessed as competently being able to achieve all of the criteria across the six stages of FourCoach curriculum listed above, they can fairly confidently describe themselves as a complete player.

Reaching this stage does not ever mean that a player no longer needs a coach, however. A coach plays a valuable part in the further development of a player to reach new and more challenging goals.

Additionally, a coach of a player at this level should assist a player in constantly evolving, reaching full physical potential, growing mentally with each new challenge, learning about other competing players in the game and so on.

Assessment Guide

Use this 30-second checklist to identify what your player has achieved and what they still need to work towards.

Player:

Date:

STAGE ONE - SKILLS				STAGE ONE - TACTICS	
Hockeys' the ball				Scores points, games, sets	
Balloons' the ball				Listens attentively	
Shadows technique to learn				Shows ready position	
Middle of strings - forehand				Takes turns, waits patiently	
Middle of strings - backhand				Friendly interactions with coach and peers	
Middle of strings - volley				Hugs' racquet when coach is explaining	
Middle of strings - serves				Scores out loud after each point	
Serves into box from service line				Gives fair, honest, accurate line calls	
STAGE ONE - MOVEMENT					
Can sprint forwards					
Can jog backwards					
Sidesteps to sideline					
Split steps on command					
Slides - both feet					
Split step to change direction					
Side on stance					
Uses front foot					
Weight transfer during stroke					
Weight transfer during serve					

Notes for other coaches (optional)

Assessment Guide

Use this 30-second checklist to identify what your player has achieved and what they still need to work towards.

Player:

Date:

STAGE TWO - SKILLS							
Forehands - 20 into play from feed				Split step to change direction			
Backhands - 20 into play from feed				Retrieves dropshot from standing start			
Volleys - 20 into play from feed				Retrieves dropshot from direction change			
Serves - 10 into play in a row				Weight transfer using open stance forehand			
Slice backhand for recovery				Weight transfer during serve			
Slice backhand for net approach				STAGE TWO - TACTICS			
Lob over stationary player				Can identify an opponent's weakness			
Effective dropshot using slice				Can identify an opponent's strength			
Effective dropshot using volley				Can identify own weakness/es			
Returns serve cross court - 10 in a row				Can identify own strength/s			
Returns serve down the middle - 10 in a row				Can articulate a game plan			
Returns serve down the line - 10 in a row				Demonstrates three 'gears' of play			
Incorporates smash at net				Rallies consistently			
Open stance on forehand				Can score an advantage tie-break			
STAGE TWO - MOVEMENT							
Springs forwards with slide							
Jogs backwards to smash							
Sidestep to each sideline with slide							
Split step timed to opponent's stroke							

Notes for other coaches (optional)

Assessment Guide

Use this 30-second checklist to identify what your player has achieved and what they still need to work towards.

Player:

Date:

STAGE THREE - SKILLS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	STAGE THREE - TACTICS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Serves into play, follows to net		Crosses for volley, switch with partner	
Serves into play, makes first volley regularly		Recognises application for tandem	
Serves into play - out wide - 10 in a row		Effectively employs i-formation, tandem	
Serves into play - body - 10 in a row		Develops a doubles game plan	
Serves into play - tee - 10 in a row		Can identify opponents' weakness/es	
Flat serve - 10 in a row		Can identify opponents' strength/s	
Slice serve - 10 in a row		Speaks positively with partner at all times	
Topspin/kick serve - 10 in a row		Discusses next point tactics with partner	
Volley both sides, shoulder height - 10 in a row			
Volley both sides, waist height - 10 in a row			
Volley both sides, bent low - 10 in a row			
Volley as a lob into 4m cone radius - 5 in a row			
Returns serve with topspin, dropped at feet			
Defensive lob as slice and topspin, regularly			
Offensive lob as slice and topspin, regularly			
STAGE THREE - MOVEMENT			
Vertical leap - high proficiency			
Lunges - high proficiency			
Squats - high proficiency			

Notes for other coaches (optional)

Assessment Guide

Use this 30-second checklist to identify what your player has achieved and what they still need to work towards.

Player:

Date:

STAGE FOUR - SKILLS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Groundstrokes technique - fine tuned		Absorbs external pressures confidently	
Volley technique fine-tuned			
Serve technique fine-tuned			
Defensive slide retrieval			
Defensive lob			
Attacking forehand approach to corner			
Attacking backhand approach to corner			
Side and open stance used interchangeably			
Split step consistently used on return of serve			
Split step consistently used throughout rally			
Volleys into play when net is approached			
STAGE FOUR - MOVEMENT			
Consistently returns to mid-baseline in rally			
Anticipates, moves before opponent hits			
Weight transfer in-line with stroke direction			
STAGE FOUR - TACTICS			
Demonstrates positive self-talk when down			
Reflects upon performance with insight			
Says 'good shot' to opponent			

Notes for other coaches (optional)

Assessment Guide

Use this 30-second checklist to identify what your player has achieved and what they still need to work towards.

Player:	Date:
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STAGE FIVE - SKILLS	✔		✔
(Double hand only) backhand to open stance pivot foot		Mental toughness - maintains composure	
Uses opponent's power with shortened swing		Wln/loss ratio better than 50%	
Scrambles when defending to even ground			
Regularly attacks short ball or second serve			
Plans/follows through in point construction			
Has developed at least one weapon			
Anticipates an opponent attacking weakness			
Counter-attacks powerful shots			
Technique on all shots - minimal flaws			
STAGE FIVE - MOVEMENT			
Can move lightly during point on toes			
Uses shorter steps to improve timing			
Speed around court considered a strength			
Can maintain energy through full match			
STAGE FIVE - TACTICS			
Uses serve placement to construct point			
Uses variety to prevent opponent rhythm			
Mixes shot depth, power, spin			
Demonstrates adaptability when down			

Notes for other coaches (optional)

Assessment Guide

Use this 30-second checklist to identify what your player has achieved and what they still need to work towards.

Player:	Date:
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STAGE SIX - SKILLS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No shots considered to be a weakness			
Passing shot accuracy - opponent at net			
Can defend with slice on both sides			
STAGE SIX - MOVEMENT			
Agility turns scrambling into counter attack			
Rarely concedes to a dropshot			
Anticipates most lobs, converts to smash			
STAGE SIX - TACTICS			
Constructs points around own strengths			
Constructs points around opponent weakness			
High intensity maintained from beginning			
Works for dominance in each point			
Formulates game plan during hit-up			
Can adapt game plan mid-match			
Focuses when down to reverse pressure			

Notes for other coaches (optional)

MODIFICATION

Adapting other programs

A place for modification

The FourCoach curriculum follows a progression of skills that are absolute requisites in the development of complete tennis players. The curriculum has been developed to assist coaches in creating individual lesson focuses for students as well as tracking progress through a no-fuss, simple reporting methodology.

One rationale of the FourCoach curriculum is the recognition that coaches have countless games, activities, drills and routines that work for them and because of this, the FourCoach curriculum only describes necessary skills, movements and tactical mindset that need to be assessed at each stage. How a player comes to find competency with each attribute is the domain of the coach.

An equally important tenet of the curriculum is the widely shared belief that it is detrimental to any player to have to unlearn poor habits later on, or to develop with debilitating areas of weakness in skill, movement and tactical planning. Each stage has a clearly defined checklist that must be complete before reaching a new stage.

Whether a player has ambitions of becoming a professional tennis player or just good enough to beat their mates on a social day, they need to have a well-rounded education and the words 'I hate my backhand' should never ever be uttered.

Low Pressure Balls

Low pressure balls can certainly be used in place of standard balls in the earlier stages of the FourCoach curriculum and this decision should be made by a coach, based on age, size or strength of a player. The skills, movements and tactical development of a player can be used with any pressure ball.

The great players over the decades such as Federer, Jean-King, Nadal, Sampras, Navratilova, Agassi, Williams, Graf, Lendl, Connors, Borg and co. were not introduced into the game with low pressure balls. That is not to say that modified equipment can't make things easier for the tiny people in our game. FourCoach believes that building a complete game around progressive skills, movements and tactics should be the main focus.

The role of the coach is to employ a variety of techniques and processes to help a player reach their true potential.

Equipment modification helps a player become acquainted with the game.

Games help a player become engaged in the game.

Drills and competitions help a player learn more about the game.

Following an educational curriculum helps a player build mastery and confidence in their game.