League Tennis Starter Manual
WELCOME

Thank you for your interest in organizing a league tennis program. As you know, tennis players of all ages and skill levels enjoy competitive matches, camaraderie with friends and family and the many health and social benefits the sport offers while playing on a league team.

The enclosed handbook will provide a broad base of information on the five simple steps to starting a successful new league tennis program:

1) Evaluate your community
2) Establish rules and choose play formats
3) Organize your local league
4) Recruit players
5) Promote your league (publicity)

If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact your USTA Section Office (listed in the Resource Section of this manual) or the USTA National office at 914-696 7000.

Thank you again for your interest in starting a successful league tennis program.
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WARM-UPS

PROGRAM OVERVIEW/MISSION STATEMENT

Program Overview
The United States Tennis Association (USTA) would like to thank you for your interest in organizing a league tennis program in your community. As you know, tennis players of all ages enjoy competitive matches, camaraderie with friends and family and the many health and social benefits the sport offers while playing on a league team.

League tennis brings all aspects of tennis into play—fun, social, fitness, and competition.

Mission Statement
To organize and establish a league tennis program in my community.
FIRST SET

EVALUATE YOUR COMMUNITY

Every community should have a tennis league. If your community has at least one tennis court then you can organize and establish a tennis league. Follow these simple steps to get your tennis league started.

Step #1 Determine the number of tennis courts in your community. Tennis courts may be found at a local park, apartment complex/gated community, high school or college and at public and private tennis clubs.

Step #2 Determine the availability and fees (if any) for the courts. Contact the agency responsible for managing the facility (e.g., club representative, homeowner’s association, or city recreation office).

Step #3 Determine the time of year for your league tennis program. Plan your season accordingly!

Step #4 Determine the time of day and the days of the week the courts are currently being used. This will assist in your scheduling of matches.
SECOND SET

ESTABLISH RULES & PLAY FORMAT

Step #1 Establish basic rules
The International Tennis Federation (ITF) establishes the rules of tennis. The USTA is the governing body of tennis in the United States and provides further comments to the ITF rules in the book titled Friend at Court. A shorter version of the rules is also published in the Rules of Tennis. Anyone organizing a league should obtain a copy of either or both of these publications. The USTA Bookstore carries both books and can be ordered by calling 888-832-8291 or by going online at www.usta.com. Also, the rules of tennis are available for free on www.usta.com.

Beyond the basic rules of tennis, leagues need to ensure that play is fair for all participants. This can be accomplished by establishing essential league regulations. It is best to keep regulations to a minimum, while making certain that any ground rules you feel are necessary are clearly spelled out.

For Basic Tennis League Regulations, see Appendix A.

Step #2 Determine play format
Simply put, a format is a way of organizing match play in terms of the number of positions; whether matches will be all singles, all doubles, or both; whether participants will be all male, all female, or mixed; etc. When choosing a format for a league, you need to take into account the number of players you have available to participate, their skill levels, age of players, what they want to get out of league play, age of players and scoring methods.

BASIC LEAGUE FORMATS

The following are some suggested basic formats for starting a new league:

**General Leagues:** Any combination of singles and/or doubles that can be supported by enough players. They may include both genders with gender specific singles and/or doubles followed by a mixed doubles portion. Typical leagues consist of from three to five positions in a team match.

**College and Young Adult Leagues (ages 19 to 25):** Use one women’s singles, one men’s singles, and a mixed doubles. The same players could be used for the mixed doubles, so that more teams could be formed. This provides for small teams and lots of socialization.

**Leagues for Entry-Level Players:** Have players play two 1/2-hour singles matches and a 1/2-hour doubles match. This way players get a variety of play, and if a match is lopsided, it’s short. If possible, it would benefit entry-level players to have a pro roam the courts to help coach the players and improve their skills.

**Parent/Child League with Handicap Scoring:** Using a handicap scoring system to keep matches even, this format focuses entirely on the social aspects of the sport and having fun. For example, see page 8.

**Timed Matches:** When either court availability or the participants’ time is limited, consider using timed matches. These matches can use either regular scoring or no-ad scoring. In either case, at a set time, play stops and the individual or team that is ahead at that time wins. In timed matches the scoring becomes important. You may count individual sets won or individual games won.

**Junior Leagues:** A combination of singles and doubles matches, which include girls and boys of similar ability. These leagues typically include a practice and match each week of the season.
EXISTING LEAGUE FORMATS

The following is a list of some of the more well-known tennis league formats.

**USTA League Tennis:** Currently with nearly 600,000 participants, USTA League Tennis is the most successful tennis program in the world. Four divisions are offered nationally, Adult, Senior, Mixed, and Super Senior. Other divisions, such as Combo Doubles and Senior Mixed, are offered by many USTA sections. Players participate at their NTRP level (see Appendix B & B1 for more information on NTRP system). USTA League Tennis brings all aspects of tennis into play—fun, social, fitness, and competition. Teams winning at the local level advance to championship play at the state, then the section level, culminating in national championships. To find out how to get involved, go to [www.usta.com](http://www.usta.com) and click on USTA League Tennis.

**USTA Junior Team Tennis:** In USTA Junior Team Tennis, the team concepts emphasizes fun, fitness, and friends while refining skill development for players of all ages and levels of competition. Players participate at their NTRP (see Appendix B & B1 for more information on the NTRP system) level as determined by the player, coach or parent. Teams compete at the local level with winners advancing to State, Section and National Championship play. To find out how to get involved, go to [www.usta.com](http://www.usta.com) and click on USTA Junior Team Tennis.

**World Team Tennis:** The WTT Recreational Leagues are played in parks, clubs, and tennis facilities in more than 1,000 U.S. cities. The co-ed team format uses the NTRP and features men’s and women’s singles, men's and women’s doubles, and mixed doubles. World Team Tennis offers an opportunity to advance to regional championships. More information is available on the World Team Tennis Web site. Go to [www.wtt.com](http://www.wtt.com) and click on Recreational Leagues.

**K-Swiss:** The K-Swiss League provides singles competition for adult men and women ages 21 and up who are at eleven different skill levels. Players sign up, have their skill levels verified, and are placed in a division of six to twelve people within their local city area. Members have one scheduled match per week, which must be completed within a two-week time period. The day and time of the match are set at the mutual convenience of the two players. Each league season lasts seven to eight weeks and is followed by three weeks of exciting playoff tournament action. For more information, go to [www.ultimatetennis.com](http://www.ultimatetennis.com).

Additional considerations when selecting a format of play include:

**Age** - Most league formats are adaptable to any age group and many can be used with combined age groups to form a league. Usual age categories are:

- **Juniors:** Ages 8 to 18
- **Seniors:** Ages 50 and up
- **Adults:** Ages 19 and up
- **Super Seniors:** Ages 60 and up

**Scoring** - In league play, it is necessary to formulate a method for scoring both matches and teams in order to determine each team’s placement within the league. Several suggested ways of doing each of these are listed below.

**Match Scoring**

- Two out of three sets with a set tie-break at 6-6
- Two sets with a match tie-break in lieu of a third set
- Pro sets (one set to 8 or 10 games)
- Timed matches
- No-ad scoring (i.e., when the score is 40-all, the next point wins)

**Team Scoring**

- One point for each position won
- One point for each position won and a bonus point for total games
- Weighted scoring system to encourage playing in order of strength (i.e., give more value to first positions than last)
- Sets won or lost
- Games won or lost
ORGANIZE YOUR LOCAL LEAGUE

All tennis leagues require some type of organizational structure to manage or administer its operation. This can be accomplished by one person or you could assemble a group of participants who make up a governing body to administer the league.

To run an effective league, you need to address the following areas: Administration, Budgets and Finance, League Fee Structure, Sponsorships and Liability.

Administration

- Arranging for courts
- Recruiting players
- Developing league rules and guidelines for play
- Handling team registrations
- Scheduling matches
- Promoting your league (publicity)
- Obtaining awards and prizes
- Coordinating social activities
- Approaching potential sponsors

As your program grows, you may want to consider the following:

- Establish a timeline for organizing your league (e.g., six months before the first match is played the court arrangements are made). For a more detailed timetable, see Appendix C.
- Obtain not-for-profit status from the IRS. This favorable tax status will help you gain sponsorships and donations in turn helping your bottom line. For more information on how to obtain tax-exempt status for your not-for-profit organization, see Appendix D.
- The USTA offers an on-line league registration system, TennisLink, which is available to anyone. TennisLink has been proven to save time for the program organizers and enhance the value of playing in the league for your customers.

Budgets and Finances

Determining financial requirements and the preparation of a league budget are necessary components of any league program. By identifying your league’s requirements, you will be able to determine what income will be needed to run the league, which in turn will help you to establish fees to be paid by the players and/or to set sponsorship goals. Some items that need to be budgeted for are the following:

- Telephone bills
- Printing (letters, captains’ and players’ lists, schedules, etc.)
- Postage
- Captains’ gifts
- Stationery and other supplies
- Court fees
- Tennis balls
- Awards and trophies
- Organized social events

For a sample league tennis budget, see Appendix E.
League Fee Structure
As a rule, determining the fee requirements to administer any type of league structure is pretty straightforward. It merely involves identifying those elements that may require funding such as:

- Court costs for matches
- Administrative expenses (e.g., office supplies, publicity costs, etc.)
- Expenses for league-sponsored social activities and refreshments
- Cost of tennis balls (if provided by the league)
- Cost of management personnel (if the league reimburses a coordinator, teaching pro, treasurer, or other administrator for services rendered)
- Cost of T-shirts/uniforms (typically aligned with junior leagues like USTA Junior Team Tennis)

You should charge a fee that will cover all league expenses for the season and to have the participants pay prior to the beginning of the league. One fee, paid prior to the start of league play, simplifies life for everyone.

Sponsorships
As mentioned above, it takes funds to run your league effectively. Monies for printing, postage, office supplies, and other expenses need to be raised and budgeted. Whereas players pay fees for financing much of league play, one way to keep costs down for players is by procuring sponsorships. Sponsorships are also a fruitful way to start a league before you are able to assess player fees.

Potential sources of sponsorships include local stores, organizations, and individuals, such as food chains, restaurants, sporting goods stores, tennis specialty shops, insurance companies, realty agencies, sports physical therapists, and sports medicine clinics. Civic groups, such as Rotary, Elks, Kiwanis, and Knights of Columbus and companies that want to promote employee health and enjoyment are also rich sources of sponsorships.

Liability
As your program grows and you consider other sites and facilities, you may want to review the need for a waiver of league liability. A sample Waiver of Claims is located in Appendix F. It may be adapted to meet your needs. Please consult your attorney on any specific questions relating to personal liability.
FOURTH SET

RECRUIT PLAYERS

Your league is almost ready to begin playing, but in order to do so, you must have some players. Here are some basic thoughts in recruiting players.

Selecting a target audience:
Selecting a target audience requires a basic understanding of the makeup of your community. For example, if you have a growing population of retirees, it probably makes sense to offer a league program designed for older adults. Another example would be taking advantage of having large corporations in your community by developing a corporate league with co-ed teams from within these companies.

Your local chamber of commerce can provide information on the population base and businesses in your community. Other local resources may include churches, park and recreation agencies, rotary clubs and other civic organizations. Schools and after-school locations (i.e. Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA’s, etc.) are the best avenues to recruit children for league participation.

Recruiting players:
Now that you have evaluated your target audience, here are some basic tactics to recruit players. Please make note, it is extremely important that all promotional materials should have a consistent message and look. This will help you create an identity for your local league and over time the consumer will begin to easily recognize the program.

Promotional tactics

- **Word of mouth:** This really works! Start “talking up” your new league among existing tennis players and parents.
- **Posters/Flyers:** Place these in areas around town where your selected target audience frequents. This may be places of worship, libraries, supermarkets, corporate lunchrooms, fitness centers, schools, park facilities, etc.
- **E-mail:** It is quick, easy and inexpensive. Develop a list of interested players and parents and ask them to forward league information to their friends. Also, many corporations will send out information to their employees about fun and healthy activities in the community. Seek out their human resource director and ask them to forward it to their employees. Use other youth organizations’ email lists to attract players to your league.
- **Newsletters:** Placing information about your league into the newsletters of tennis associations, park and recreation departments, clubs, businesses, places of worship, etc will expand your reach into the community. Many times this can be accomplished for free!
- **Web Site:** Establish a web site for your league and include the URL on all printed materials. This will help add credibility to your program and will create a portal for player information.
- **Direct mail:** Direct mail can be costly but very effective. The key to direct mail success is only mailing to people within your target audience. This minimizes printing and postage costs and increases your return on investment. For a sample promotional letter, see Appendix G.
- **Print ads:** Depending upon your market, this may be a very effective way to reach your target audience. Remember to ask for placements in certain parts of the paper read by your potential customer and depending upon your not-for-profit status, your organization may receive discounted pricing. Also, ask for a free listing in the community events/calendar section of the newspaper and online.
- **Database development:** Build a database consisting of existing and potential players to market your program. You can seek referrals from these people and easily communicate with this group throughout the year.
Organizing Teams & Match Play:
Now that you have recruited your players, you’re ready to begin organizing teams and match play. This entails deciding on such things as the number of teams in your league, team composition, the league’s season and schedule of play and whether to establish an opportunity for advancement.

Rating Players:
Whether a new league is established to create competitive play, social play, or both, it is important for the players to be compatible abilitywise. The primary goal of any rating system, formal or informal, is to correctly assess the skill level of players. The following are descriptions of some of the most widely used rating systems and other methods of placing players with similar skill levels on teams:

The National Tennis Rating Program (NTRP): Developed by the United States Tennis Association (USTA), United States Professional Tennis Association (USPTA), and International Health and Racquet Sports Association (IHRSA) in 1979. The intent was to create a rating system that would be used nationally to uniformly rate all players. Today it is the dominant rating system in the United States, and NTRP has been used as a model for other rating systems throughout the world.

NTRP has skill characteristics assigned to thirteen different levels, 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, etc. up to 7.0. A player rated at 1.0 has never played tennis, while one rated at 7.0 is a world-class player. To establish a rating, players can read the characteristics and self-rate, they can have a USPTA or PTR (i.e., Professional Tennis Registry) pro observe them and suggest an NTRP rating, or they can compare themselves to a player or players who have established NTRP ratings. Opponents that are more than one NTRP level apart would not have a compatible match. See Appendix B & B1 for NTRP player descriptions.

Informal Rating: A formal rating system does not have to be used to get a league started. A Sunday afternoon round robin (i.e., a format where each team plays every other team in its group) could be held for all players interested in taking part in leagues. Results from the round robin are then used to split players into the number of leagues required to get all of the participants involved. This works best when a pro or tennis instructor runs the event and creates the match play necessary to help make the decisions.

Handicapping Systems
Sometimes rating systems alone are insufficient for placing players on teams in a manner that will result in competitive play for all participants. This often happens when there are not enough players of similar skill levels available to play in a league. When this happens, a handicapping system can be used to equalize play. One example of informal handicapping systems follow.

Love-15: The team that is up a game plays the next game down by Love-15.

League/Team Composition:
Establishing your league and team composition entails deciding on how many teams to have in the league, how many players to have on each team, how to assign players to teams vis-a-vis their skill levels, and other issues.

Typically, the number of players on a team should be no more than twice the number of positions. For example, a format with two singles and three doubles needs eight positions, which translates to approximately sixteen players on the team. In addition, leagues usually consist of five to eight teams. If there are more teams, the league should consider dividing into flights with four or five teams in each flight, the rationale again being to keep the season’s time commitment relatively short, which will in turn help to maintain player interest.

For a sample team roster, see Appendix H.
**Schedule of Play**

The schedule of play should be prepared as soon as you have identified which teams will participate in your league and the length of your league’s season. *Experience indicates that leagues of short duration, six or seven weeks, tend to be most successful because players do not have to commit to a long period of time.* This works well both for winning teams and those that are out of contention in that losing teams become discouraged if the season is too long.

You have already determined court availability, now identify the timeslots available for your use and calculate the number of matches that can be played during each time period. When designing your schedule, try to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to play everyone else in their group or flight, preferably for an equal number of times. It also works best if everyone has an equal number of home and away matches. The schedule of play should include the dates, times, and locations for each match during the season.

Some scheduling arrangements that many leagues find work well are the following:

- Early riser leagues for men and women
- Evening leagues for working men and women, junior leagues, and colleges and universities
- Weekend leagues for all players, especially those who cannot play during the week
- Mid-day and morning leagues are especially attractive to seniors
- Formats that are time defined for one to two hours of play

For a sample scheduler, see Appendix I.

**Team Captains’ Meeting:**

Once you have a nucleus of league participants, you will want to hold your league’s Team Captains’ Meeting. This is your opportunity to meet with potential captains, hand out supplies, and find out how many teams will be participating in your program and whether there will be skill levels. All important aspects of your league’s program should be reviewed at the Team Captains’ Meeting.

When starting a youth league, it is important to have parents involved in aid the on-court coach with all the administrative and registration procedures. These parents will also be helpful with transportation, before/after season parties and recruitment events.

Coaches may consist of parents and certified instructors. The USTA offers additional training for the coaches through the Recreation Coach Workshops. Please see the Additional Resources section of the manual for more information.

Some useful items to assist in conducting your Team Captains’ Meeting include:
For a sample team captains’ meeting agenda, see Appendix J.
For a sample team captains’ responsibilities, see Appendix K.
For a sample scorecard, see Appendix L.
FIFTH SET

PROMOTE YOUR LEAGUE (PUBLICITY)

Generating publicity for your league will help you attract the players you need to build a strong program. In order to effectively use the media to publicize your local league, take the following steps:

• Develop a media list, which includes the name of the contact person in the sports department of your local newspapers along with his or her address, telephone number and e-mail address. (Note: you will also want to collect a media list of all health and fitness writers at your local newspapers)
• Send press releases and other pertinent information about your league to the reporter. It is critical you follow up these materials with a phone call to the reporter to let them know more about the program.

For a sample press release, see Appendix M.

Gaining coverage for tennis in your newspapers can be challenging so be creative and pitch human interest stories in addition to just reporting match scores. For example, a wheelchair player playing against able bodied players would make for an interesting story. Every local league has interesting storylines. It is up to you to share them with the media.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Tennis Rule Books
Friend at Court
Rules of Tennis
Both of these books are available for purchase through the USTA at usta.com or by calling the USTA bookstore at 888-832-8291.

Professional Teaching Organizations
Professional Tennis Registry - www.ptrtennis.org
United States Professional Tennis Association - www.uspta.org

Powerful On-line Tools
TennisLink
TennisLink is the USTA’s league management software that saves time and reduces paperwork for league organizers. TennisLink enables organizers to easily schedule matches, track stats and standings, verify USTA Membership and NTRP levels and much more. To learn more about TennisLink visit www.usta.com

USTA Marketing Materials
The USTA has developed a comprehensive marketing kit for both USTA League and USTA Junior Team Tennis. These marketing materials, designed to attract new players to your programs and complement the USTA’s national marketing efforts, can be obtained by contacting your local USTA section office.

Financial and Material Grants
The USTA and its section network provide over $6 million in financial and material grants every year. Whether you are looking to refurbish or construct tennis courts, attend a training workshop, start a league, or just need a starter grant to hire a pro or purchase equipment, the USTA can help.

Grants are available in the following areas:

- Diversity/Multicultural Programming
- Public Facility Funding
- Equipment
- Events/Workshops
- Wheelchair Tennis
- College Scholarships
- Project/Programming Support
- Community Outreach
- Collegiate Recreation
- Junior Team Tennis start-up grants

For more information on USTA grants, e-mail grants@usta.com.
ADDITIONAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Recreational Coach Workshops
Interested in learning the basics? Then a Recreation Coach Workshop is for you.

At a Recreational Coach Workshop, a specially trained, certified teaching professional will lead active 6 hour on-court session and a 2 hour classroom session on:

• Teaching large groups.
• The play-based approach on coaching.
• Running effective team practices.
• Games, drills, and strategies every coach should know.

Training sessions are scheduled on a first come, first served basis and must have at least 20 people signed up for the session.

Past attendees include:

• Parents seeking the basics in coaching and organizing their kids tennis teams
• Park and Recreation coaches, high school and seasonal coaches interested in improving their skills
• Current players seeking part-time teaching jobs

The more quality programs you offer, the more play opportunities for your players/members, more court time used. For more information on hosting a Recreational Coach Workshop please email rcw@usta.com.

In addition, the USTA offers two workshops designed to improve your on-court offerings as well as your business operations.

Tennis Teachers’ Conference
The USTA Tennis Teachers Conference brings together nearly 700 teaching professionals, coaches, recreational leaders, physical education teachers and sport scientists to experience presentations in tennis coaching and programming. Held during the first week of the US Open, the conference provides the attendees an opportunity to watch the best players in the world and learn from leading authorities in the sport.

Community Tennis Development Workshop
The Community Tennis Development Workshop directly supports the people involved in true grassroots tennis. It provides an opportunity for education, encouragement, and inspiration for more than 500 tennis leaders and coordinators from around the country who are promoting and developing tennis in their communities.

For more information on USTA educational workshops, visit usta.com
The USTA has 17 section offices with a dedicated staff and volunteer network ready to assist you with the start of your league program. Simply contact your local section office to get started today!