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# **The U.S. High School Tennis Coaches Association**

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# **High School Tennis Coaches Workbook**

**Edition III**

**Selected articles, drills, charts and forms  
from *High School Tennis Coach***

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# USHSTCA High School Tennis Coaches Workbook

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\*Denotes new articles in this year's edition

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## Build Tactics into Practices

As you begin your season, you should discuss with each of your players what style of play they will use (e.g., serve-and-volley, aggressive baseliner, etc.), based on their current skills.

The article *Individual Practice Plans* in this workbook provides more information on this subject.

In the first part of your three-part season, the preparation phase (see *Planning Your Season* articles in the this workbook), you should be working on any technique changes your players will need to make in order to help them use the shots and shot combinations that will be necessary to execute the tactics that go with the style of play they will be using.

As we will stress many times in this workbook, coaches should not work on technique in a vacuum. Stroke changes will be made much more quickly and long-term if they are made to solve a playing problem.

With the forehand, for example, you will undoubtedly have players who have several technical problems (bad footwork, elbow out, late preparation). Which change should you make first? Which is the key hitting error that is preventing them from playing better?

The following lesson plan will help you make your players stronger players by effectively integrating technical and tactical work.

### Step #1 — Warm Up

Warm up strokes, starting with short-court tennis moving back to the baseline. This should not include aggressive, lunging movements, since players are still cold.

### Step #2 — Stretch

Remember, a static stretch is not recommended for tennis players. Use dynamic stretching before the start of a practice. See the article *Are Your Players Stretching Correctly?*

### Step #3 — Prior Practice Review

Review the skills practiced/learned in the previous practice.

### Step #4 — Tactical Set-Up

Review a singles or doubles tactic your players will see in matches, and have them practice it for five minutes to see how they currently handle this situation. In doubles, a common situation would be the one-up/one-back scenario, with two players rallying from the baseline, while two players watch on from their positions at the net. In singles, playing a short ball through the mid-court is a common occurrence.

### Step #5 — Tactical Solutions Discussion

After players have tried the drill for five minutes, playing actual points, discuss solutions to this situation. If you are unsure of the answer yourself, ask team members to discuss these situations and come to a consensus. In the one-up/one-back situation, for example, deep balls often produce a weak response which the net person can pick off, or produces a short ball the baseliner can attack, or produces an outright error. A short ball forces a baseline player to run forward; if they have a two-handed backhand, this will produce a weak response. A third option in this situation is the lob.

### Step #6 — Tactical Solutions Practice

Now that your players have some solutions to this situation, pick one and have them play for another five minutes trying to effect this tactical solution.

### Step #7 — Technical Work

Once players have attempted this tactic, you may now work on technical changes to help them get depth on their groundstrokes, help them hit short and crosscourt, or put lobs in play deep. Dead-ball drills are now useful, if you set them up to mirror a tactical situation (in our doubles example, you might have players hit from the baseline, crosscourt and deep to realistic target areas). Make sure players always hit three balls before going to the end of the line to make this type of drilling useful from a motor learning perspective and to promote better body balance and footwork.

### Step #8 — Tactical/Technical Work

Now that players have worked on their strokes specifically to help them with a particular playing situation, have them go back to the original drill, trying to solve it with their new-found tactical and technical skills.

### Step #9 — Review

As with any other lesson, a review of the day's activities and preview of the next lesson should conclude the instructional part of your practice.

### Step #10 — Conditioning

### Step #11 — Cool Down

Always finish practice with a cool down. This is the time for your static stretches.

## Poaching — Part II (How to Poach)

In the article *Poaching — Part I (When to Poach)*, we discussed that the key to successful poaching in doubles is not so much a result of how you poach, but when you poach.

In this article, we'll look at the technical aspects of poaching.

To review what we learned in the first article, successful poaching requires educated anticipation on the part of the poacher to give him an early, extra step and several more feet of distance to make the poach.

The key here is the word “educated.” Randomly guessing when to poach, or poaching out of frustration, is not effective. Net players must watch their opponents to gauge the opponent's comfort level, anticipating a weak ball if the opponent is out of position or backing up. Poaching off the serve should also be done in communication with your partner, as the poach is more effective off a serve down the middle, because it takes away the alley shot (the poacher does not have to cover this) and forces the receiver to hit the ball inside out in order to keep it away from the net person.

### How to Poach

There are two keys to effective poaching mechanics, both having to do with the direction of the poach.

First, players **MUST** continue across the center service line after they poach, taking the opposite side of the court after they make their volley, for three key reasons. If a player poaches only to the center service line in order to stay on “her side of the court,” this will: 1) reduce her range on the poach; 2) keep her weight out of the volley; and 3) confuse her partner who will not know whether she should cover behind her partner or stay where she is.

Make sure your players know that when they poach, it is a full commitment, with no going back. If you've ever seen two players in an I formation, there's a better than even chance that the net person poached and came back.

Once you poach, it's your partner's responsibility to switch behind you and cover you.

One key reason players do not poach more often, or without more commitment, is that they believe they have to cover the entire width of the court from alley to alley, and that they don't have the speed to do this.

In fact, a net player only needs to take two steps past the center service line to effectively cover a crosscourt ground-stroke from an opponent. Taking just two steps past the center service line allows the net person to cover almost all of the possible return angle of the opponent. If an opponent can hit a crosscourt winner in the few feet the net person leaves open, it's a rare shot.

Give up the miracle shot in order to set up the winning poach you can expect the other 95 percent of the time.

The second key aspect to poaching is to cut off the ball on an angle — this means poaching forward, closing the net. Many players poach laterally, allowing the ball more time to move away from them crosscourt. Poachers are also able to get less weight into the ball if they are moving laterally instead of forward.

The diagram on the skill-building drill *Poaching on Angle* shows the diagonal path a poacher should take.

Remember, if you have decided to poach, you are making an all-or-nothing commitment and you should not sacrifice your angles and ability to put the ball away by hanging back to cover a lob. Teach your players to close and get on top of the net for this putaway.

### Summary

Teach your players to poach moving completely across the center service line and on angle. They will immediately see how much more court they can cover, how much better they can poach, and how much easier and more effective poaching can be when combined with the anticipation they learned in your prior poaching drills.

For more on poaching, see these related articles:

*Poaching — Part I (When to Poach)*

*Rally Poaching*

*Poaching on an Angle*

## Poaching on an Angle

In order to effectively poach, players must poach not only laterally, but on an angle, to increase the angle they have to put the volley away, as well as to decrease the time the ball has to run away from them and drop due to gravity.

The diagram on this page shows an effective poaching path for net players to take, as opposed to the common lateral path taken by more inexperienced players.

Players must learn to cross the center service line and make a commitment to switching sides with their partner. The following drill will help your players practice the most effective angle to the ball when poaching.

**Step #1** — Have players line up in a single file line, with the first player (Player A) lining up at the net in the deuce court (as if his or her partner were serving and he or she were at their starting position. All other players should wait in line behind the service line.

**Step #2** — Player A receives a low feed from the coach who is directly in front of Player A, on the baseline, similar to where Player A's opponent would be receiving serve. Player A attempts to volley the ball back deep to the coach, who plays the ball crosscourt.

If your players or you do not have the control to do this, have Player A use the first volley as a practice volley, then the coach will bounce-feed a second ball crosscourt, similar.

**Step #3** — Player A moves to poach immediately before the coach feeds the second ball (as the ball bounces), moving on an angle, finishing two steps past the center service line.

**Step #4** — Depending on whether the poacher is left-handed or right-handed, the poacher hits the volley across his or her body, either at the feet of the opposing opponent, now directly across the net from them at on ad court service line (this player would be represented by a cone, or with an actual player who tries to play out the point), or on a sharp angle away from both opponents.

**Step #5** — Player moves to end of line.

**Variation** — Players can begin on the service line, receiving a mid-court volley from the coach, working their way into the net, then receiving the two volleys in the previous sequence.

