

Team Teaching - Playing Doubles Tennis

Sometimes we find ourselves in a situation that, while familiar, isn't quite the same. People who play singles tennis have the basic skills for doubles - they can serve, hit a ground stroke, a backhand, etc. But those skills alone aren't enough to make a truly successful member of a doubles team. With two, the game changes - even the rules are altered slightly. While the game, at first glance, looks the same; the differences - both real and subtle are many.

The same is true of training. While we may have done lots of training alone, the skills we need to team-teach are different. And, as in doubles tennis, the "rules" even change a bit. This article will discuss team teaching - the benefits, the rule changes and the skills that will make two good individual trainers a *great* team.

Benefits of Team Teaching

The benefits of team teaching are many for both the trainers and the learners. For the learners, team teaching allows:

- More time for one-on-one interaction with the learners.
- More personal instructor feedback during skill practice sessions.
- A second set of ears to hear and understand questions.
- A second "voice" and personal style to learn from and with.

For the trainers, team teaching allows:

- Better preparation (since less will be taught individually, available prep time can be focused on a smaller amount of content).
- A change of pace - team teaching requires somewhat less physical effort (though not any less mental effort).
- Higher comfort level. Having someone else there is helpful for logistics, timing, focus, feedback and many other reasons.

Changing the Rules - Planning for Success

There are a number of things the two trainers should do before the session starts. Schedule planning time as far ahead of the session as possible. If you don't know your partner, start by getting to know them. Learn as much as you can about each other's preferred training style, and your individual strengths and weaknesses. One of your initial tasks is to determine who's going to teach what. Use relevant experience, interest and comfort level to help determine this division. Successful team teaching is more than different people teaching different parts of the session. **To make it most effective for the learners, both trainers need to know all of the content.**

Discuss too the role each of you will play. Questions you should discuss include:

- Who will open and close the session?
- Who will make sure breaks start and end on time?
- Who is the lead trainer?
- Who will lead the practice sessions?
- How will the other trainer interact with the group when not "in charge"?

Also decide how you will deal with some common classroom occurrences like:

- What do we do when we don't agree on the answer to a question? (*Strong suggestion: consider leaving it with the first answer, checking with each other at break, and modifying or changing your answer after break if appropriate.*)
- How do we signal if the pace is incorrect?
- How will we deal with difficult students? What's our plan of attack? Who's ultimately responsible?
- How will we deal with less than adequate participation? (*Suggestion: the "resting" trainer can sit in the group part of the time, being an active, participating "student."*)

New Skills - The Logistics of Team Teaching

Another planning issue is a logistical one - Where will the "resting" trainer be while their partner is leading the group? One approach is for the trainer who is "resting" to sit in the back, at a separate table. This keeps them from being a distraction to the group, provides them a chance to help with timing, pointing to those with questions, etc. It does not however, allow for the resting trainer to be smoothly involved in the session.

The other approach is to have both trainers at the front of the room. The "resting" trainer would probably sit in a higher chair, off to the side (to reduce the chance of distraction). This position allows for easier interplay between the trainers. It allows each to answer questions, observe if there are additional questions, provide seamless transitions, etc. It also gives the lead trainer some help in turning on or managing equipment, scribing at the flipchart, etc. It helps the group be more comfortable with both trainers. In order to use this approach, both trainers must feel comfortable with it. If both are, and they practice the skills mentioned above, then it is the more effective approach.

It is critical, regardless of where the "resting" trainer is, that they are there - both physically and mentally. As the resting trainer your job is to be attentive and ready to assist in any way (not to be studying your upcoming section, reading the newspaper or checking your phone messages outside of the room).

Breaks and Team Teaching

Breaks are always welcome during a session, especially when you have a co-trainer. Use these breaks for:

- Checking in on timing - are we on track timewise?
- Giving basic feedback on content or training process.
- Making minor mid-course corrections or adjustments.
- Making sure you are meeting the group's needs and expectations.

When It's Over - It's Not Over!

After the session is over, make the time to sit down and discuss how it went. Use the time to relax, unwind, celebrate, and learn. Give each other feedback on both content and process (Both positive and corrective). Review the feedback from the group. Discuss what should be done differently the next time. Make notes on all these items to preserve the learning and to ensure the completion of any agreements.

If it is a multi-day session, talk about your roles and any adjustments you feel you should make. For everyone's benefit, save any serious feedback until the end of the overall session - to avoid any negative feelings which might impact the next session.

If you'll take this advice, use these new skills and knowledge and note these subtle "rule changes", you'll be able to effectively team teach. And just like in tennis, your results will be better than if you just went out as a singles player, trying to play doubles.

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