

# The Athlete Matrix

## ENCOURAGE STAGE 10 – 12 years of age

Welcome to the fourth instalment of the Athlete Development Matrix brought to you by Tennis Australia. This article provides a snapshot of the ENCOURAGE stage, which has been designed for children aged between 10 and 12 years old.

The previous issue of CoachesWorld featured the DEVELOPMENT stage, which outlined how children can start to polish the basic fundamental and locomotor skills. These elements build on the vast array of other skills required to play tennis.

In short, the ENCOURAGE stage is about fine tuning these developed skills by being able to perform them at higher speeds, with greater accuracy, and with increased levels of control and variation in a competition environment.

The aspiring tennis players who started to emerge in the DEVELOPMENT stage are now starting to use a greater number of weapons in their arsenal. As children of this age continue to grow and mature, their coordination skills improve significantly, allowing them to develop rhythm and timing, thus creating greater racquet-head speed. The modified equipment that was utilised in the earlier stages is not as prevalent in the ENCOURAGE stage due to the players' superior skills and increased physical stature.

Coaching sessions for this age group should continue to build on this well-formed technique that promotes greater timing capabilities. This is done by encouraging the development of greater racquet head speed and the adjustment to different ball trajectories with varying degrees of spin.

Their ability to track the oncoming ball and understand an opponent's body cues gives them more time to make decisions and then utilise all areas of the court. This extra time also allows the young player to exercise the different modes of play, from defending through to attacking.

By the time children reach this age, they are likely to have had a fair amount of exposure to other sports and may already be leaning toward one sport over another. For those players who are ready for a challenge, and show the required skills, this is the age where they can begin playing more events with a knockout and feed-in format.

As with any child, coaches and parents need to monitor the level and amount of competition played at this delicate age to ensure success is met at the right times and in the right amounts. The eye still needs to be on the long term, but matchplay opportunities give players a chance to set themselves measurable goals.

To give you a greater idea of what key skills need to be developed, please refer to the chart over the page, which gives you an outline.



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The following outlines the six different stages of the Athlete Development Matrix.

EXPLORE (4–7 YEARS)

ENHANCE (12–15 YEARS)

DEVELOPMENT (7–10 YEARS)

CULTIVATE (15–17 YEARS)

ENCOURAGE (10–12 YEARS)

PERFORMANCE (17+ YEARS)

## ENCOURAGE STAGE

The eight different components of the Athlete Development Matrix:

### Physical Development

- Display improving coordination in all movement patterns
- Able to throw at high speed with accuracy and catch single-handed
- Display excellent rhythm (or timing) in striking and movement tasks

### Technical Development

- Able to perceive and use cues related to player's court position/racquet preparation/backswing and respond earlier to different balls' speeds and spins
- Adjust stance according to tactical intention
- Able to generate sufficient racquet-head speed

### Tactical Development

- Build on basic singles tactics in all five game situations
- Able to exploit an opponent's weaknesses and utilise own strengths
- Able to play on different surfaces

### Psychological Development

- Able to focus when confronted with distractions
- Try to implement what has been practiced in game-play
- Learn to deal with tension and environmental influences on performance during match play

### Social Development

- Understand the influence of the peer group on values and attitude
- Progressively copes with the changes that accompany puberty

### Parental Role and Support

- Positive, yet realistic, in their belief of their child's talent
- Reinforce good behaviour and display sporting conduct

### Education

- Understand that education is a priority throughout their lives
- Receptive to teachers and coaches who create positive environments in which skills can be developed

### Competitions and Tournaments

- Actively participate in feed-in and some knockout events
- Players should only play outside of their age group when they have a real prospect of experiencing a winning result ●

For more information on the Athlete Development Matrix go to [tennis.com.au/matrix](http://tennis.com.au/matrix).

TA Coach Members can go to the Exclusive Download section on the [tennis.com.au](http://tennis.com.au) website to see the further information on the Matrix or other coaching material.

For further information, please contact the Coach Membership Team on (03) 9914 4191 or contact your State/Territory Coach Development Coordinator or email [coachmembership@tennis.com.au](mailto:coachmembership@tennis.com.au).

