

Athletic Skill Development Activities – Mike Carter

The following is a compilation of games and activities stolen from many people much smarter than me including Butch Staples, Kirk Anderson, Jason Jamison, and Dennis Van der Meer. Some of these activities are “originals” that I created and some are written just the way I learned them from one of the people above. But in many cases, I have “remodeled” these activities to “fit my eye”. The point is that you have to be ready to modify the games to match your teaching environment and your students. Focus on the kids, do what is right for them, and most of all remember that you now have an excuse to act like a child again. Be the biggest kid of all.

Key points:

Don't spend all day doing these unless you are setting up a fitness/skills development camp. Your objective is to teach the students to rally/play. Do only a few at a time.

Safety first! Space the students appropriately and monitor their success. Modify the games as needed to suit the varying levels of skill that you will have.

Smile! Students love their teacher before the activity. You're teaching kids, not a sport. Be student-centered, not teacher-centered.

Get there early and get your learning center set up before the students arrive. Jeez!!!!

When structuring your class – start with a laugh and end with a “wow”!

Ages 5-6 Specific and Older

Balance, Coordination, Agility

Statues – Players walk/run and coach calls out “freeze”. Players freeze in their tracks!

Jogging/Walking with Arm Movement – Players walk and run while circling arms forward and backward. Mimic different birds by flapping arms like Humming bird wings (small), Robin (med.), and a condor (large). Make sure there is no racing so that they can concentrate on what they're doing.

Hopping - one foot 10 steps, then change. Eyes forward, arms at side

Agility Drill – running figure eights through cones. Change it up by going sideways. Backwards slowly (walking).

Racket Balance – Move through cones with a ball on the strings without it falling off.

10 Steps Fast – Have players run 10 steps fast, walk 10 steps, then slow run 10 steps. Add slow motion for fun.

Skipping – High knees, arms at side.

Ninja Hop-scotch – alternate hopping on one foot, then two as quietly as possible! Can you do it with your arms above your head?

Cone Touch – Have a series of cones that the kids run through touching each one. Can you add a racket and touch the top of each cone? Can you add a bean bag too?

Simon Sez – cross over step, skipping, run slow, fast, backwards, arm circles.

Bean Bag Pass – With and without racket. Add/subtract distance when necessary. Add net.

Train Wreck – Pairs. Each player with ball. Players roll ball back and forth at the same time trying not to let the trains crash! This time, make the trains crash.

Train Wreck Circle – Same game but with four (or more) in a circle

Canadian Rolling Games – Roll ball away from you and as it is traveling, run circles around it. Variation is roll ball and run and try to stop it with your foot/toe/hand/racket. Tip: for safety, have entire group roll balls in the same direction.

Canadian Golf – roll ball and run several feet in front of the spot where you think the ball will be and make a “V” with your feet. Try to position yourself to make the ball go in the “hole”. Tip: for safety, have entire group roll balls in the same direction.

Tunnel Ball (stage one) – Player 1 rolls ball on the ground to Player 2 (with hand or racket). Player 2 moves in front of ball so that it rolls through their legs.

Trap the Bug – Roll ball gently across court and have player use their hand or racket to trap/stop the ball. Can be done in pairs.

Falling Boulders – Place a ball on top of your head and let it fall down the mountain. Can you find the ball and trap it before it stops rolling? Spread out and watch out for your neighbors!!

Balance – Individual

Balance bean bag on head - Hands behind back; walk forwards/backwards; one in each hand, kneel down, turn circles, close eyes, wiggle your ears, blink your eyes, etc.

Bean bag balance on foot - alternate

Stand on one leg – alternate, eyes closed, eyes closed, move arms in circles,

Frogs in a pond – In pairs, provide each pair with two spots or donuts for “lily pads”. The objective is for both frogs to make it to the other side of the “pond” (designated area of your choosing). Player 1 is the Lily Pad Frog, and Player 2 is the Jumping Frog. Player 1 lays a lily pad in front of player 2. Player 2 jumps on it. Then Player 1 lays the second lily pad out in front of Player 2, on which she jumps. Player 1 gets the first lily pad and continues to the sequence until they reach the other side of the pond. Encourage communication as to how far the lily pad should be thrown, etc.

Sending/Receiving

Ball rolling pairs – Without racket first. Use beach balls or larger ball. Add racket. Ball must stay on ground/roll.

Balloon bumping - Hand only first. Add racket if ready.

Bean Bag/Koosh Ball pass – Hands first, add racket when ready. With racket, bean bag must not be hit, just passed to partner’s racket.

Cone Catch – Each player has a small cone. They gently toss a bean bag or Koosh Ball to their partner and attempt to catch it in their cone. Use a ball when ready. Can be done by rolling balls on the ground. Allow players to use the non-cone hand to trap ball inside if necessary.

Add a Step – If players successfully pass the bean bag 4 times without it falling to the ground, they can move one step away from each other. Once they are too far away to pass the bean bag, they simply flick it off their racket to their partner.

Athletic Development Activities - Ages 10 and Under

Coordination – Individual

Jog and juggle 1 ball from hand to hand

Fast jog, slow juggle

Slow jog, fast juggle

Skipping with juggle

Side shuffle with juggle

High knees with juggle

Heel/Butt kicks with juggle

Bicycles with juggle

Pass ball – around leg, knee, waist, neck , ear, toe, etc

Toss and leap – Toss ball high in air and leap up to catch it.

Toss and clap – “Toss ball up and clap two times”. Add claps.

Dribble ball – Dribble ball with right hand, left hand, alternate.

Dribble ball - through group

Balance – Partners

Frogs in a Pond – Can be done in pairs or individually. Same game as described for ages 5-6, but add a racket with a bean bag, koosh ball, or for the brave, a tennis ball. It is a great activity done individually without a racket. Have advanced students do it on one leg. Add a racket?

Racket See-Saw – Partners hold a racket between them and cooperatively try to gently see-saw back and forth without letting go of the racket and/or falling. Try with both legs, one leg, eyes closed.

Cooperative/Safety first! Use poly spots or donuts to give players a balance point.

Ball Pass with Feet – Roll one ball back and forth with only feet. Add another ball! Keep both balls moving constantly.

Sending/Receiving/Tracking – Partners

Colliding Clouds – Same game as train wreck but try to make balls collide in the air. (underhand tosses)

One ball roll - two ball roll

Two hands overhead

Chest pass

One player bounce passes, the other underhand tosses.

One player rolls, the other tosses underhand.

Splat – partners toss ball back and forth, underhand, trying to hit a ball pyramid set up between them

Overhead backwards two hands

Single hand – alternate hands

Popeye Pass – Pass ball to partner by bumping it off your bicep

Stretch Catch (balance) – Players in pairs toss the ball just far enough away from partner that they must stretch to catch it without falling or moving their feet at all.

Belly Button Ball – Partners toss back and forth to each other while coach calls out body parts, attempt to catch ball with two hands while touching the body part (belly button, shoulder, knee, hip, toe)

Double Vision - Toss to partner with balls side by side in one hand, one in each hand, two balls stacked like a snowman

Toss with spins – Toss to partner with one and/or two hands with different spins

Side Throw – like FH and BH

Roll to Target – Have a group (or individual) roll ball(s) to the same target (poly spot, t-shirt, court line) and see who can get the closest.

Touchdown Pass (individual) – Players throw balls high into the air as they are running down the court. Players attempt to catch the ball after one bounce (add bounces as necessary). Try to catch without letting the ball bounce. Watch for other players.

Monkey in the Middle – In groups of three, you have two players cooperatively rolling the ball back and forth and one player in the middle. The object of the game is for the rolling players to roll the ball back and forth without the ball going between the “monkey’s” feet. While facing the player with the ball, the monkey runs/shuffles to attempt to have the ball pass between his/her feet. They receive a point for every time they are successful. The ball may NOT touch their feet or they lose a point. Pay attention to the spacing of the teams so there are no collisions and make sure to rotate so everyone gets a chance to be the monkey. Make sure the rolling players keep the ball on the ground and not bounce or throw the ball back and forth.

Team Tunnel Ball – This game is similar to “Monkey in the Middle”. Divide the group into teams of 4-10. Two players in each team will have racquets and roll a ball back and forth with the remainder of the team (up 2-8 players without racquets) in between them as the “tunnel”. The object of this cooperative game is to rally more ball consecutively through the tunnel than any other team. All players making up the tunnel should start off facing the same direction and always “swivel” to be able to keep an eye on the ball.

Jog and Juggle – Each player has two balls. Have players designate one hand as their “throwing hand” and the other hand as their “catching hand”. With a ball in each hand, players 1) toss the ball in the air with their tossing hand 2) switch the ball from their catching hand into their throwing hand 3) catch the tossed ball with their catching hand. Do this stationary first, then walking, then progressing to a jog throughout the play area. Watch out for collisions. Have players switch throwing and catching hands.

Sending/Receiving/Tracking – Partners with Racket – Teenagers too

Show Off – Toss ball to partner, partner controls ball on strings after two bounces on strings, one bounce, no bounce!

Stretch Catch – Same as above but catch ball on strings

Lobster Trap pairs – Tossing player throws ball to partner who is holding two rackets. The lobster catches the balls and hits it back to partner, Switch roles.

Racket Trap (1/2 Pound Lobster) – Tossing partner tosses ball to partner that makes them adjust several steps, racket partner traps ball on strings, rolls ball back to tossing partner, Switch roles

Volley Close-in – Two players start a volley rally and close in until they can trap the ball between their two rackets. Do it for time. Backpedal when running back to position or retreat as you would in tracking down an overhead. First team to five.

The Hardest Game in the World!!! – For advanced players that have the urge to blast the ball. This is done best with traditional ball since it is SO lively. Rally a ball back and forth, but you call out a number, and the players have to let the ball bounce that many times before hitting it back. Builds control in your players.

Remember – it is easy to hit the ball hard, it is hard to hit the ball easy.

Reaction Speed – Partners

Split and Go – Player 1 runs forward towards player 2 with ball. Player 2 calls out “split” and tosses ball forward, left, or right. Player one split steps on the command and catches the ball with one or two hands.

Ball Drop – Player 1 has a ball in each hand and drops one of the balls. Player 2 reacts and tries to catch the ball before it bounces twice. Add distance or bounces as needed.

Z ball

Wall Ball - partners, one behind the other, face a wall. Player in back throws ball against wall, player in front reacts and catches it after specified number of bounces. Switch.

Call My Name (pairs) – Player 1 without ball turns back to player 2 with ball. Player 2 calls out their name of player 1 while they toss the ball in the air. Player 1 turns and tries to catch the ball after one bounce. Add bounces as necessary.

Tunnel Ball (stage two) – Player 1 with out ball turns back to player 2. Player 2 rolls the ball between the legs of player 1. Player 1 runs down the ball & catches it.

Coordination/Agility – Individual, Partners, Groups

One handed juggle with two balls; two hands, two balls

Partner Pass- Facing partner, pass balls between you. Your right hand is always sending, left hand is always receiving. Start with 1 ball, add another as you get used to the sequence. Try to get to four balls.

Racket Quickness – Partners with rackets stand 3-6 feet apart. Hold rackets by the butt with head of racket on ground. Have each player stand to the left of the racket and at the signal, each player runs to try and catch the other’s racket before it hits the ground. Add distance as necessary.

Not Warm-Up Games!! These games need warm-up prior to conducting.

Monster Town – Partners have 5-7 cones/targets placed in a line in front of them. Partner one runs and turns over the cones/targets then runs to tag their partners and the partners then runs to set the cones back up. Go for record time.

SAFETY! Treasure Tag – Groups of four players. Three of the players form a circle by holding hands. One of those players is the “treasure” and the other two or the “guards”. The fourth player (not in circle) is the “villain” who runs around the circle and tries to try tag the treasure while the guards spin in circles trying to protect the treasure.

SAFETY! Keep away – groups of four. Two against two. One team starts with the ball and passes it back and forth trying to keep it away from the other team while the other team tries to intercept the ball. Count the number of catches. Team with most successful catches wins.

SAFETY! Jump Ball Pairs – Coach or third player tosses ball up (like ref during a jump ball/tip-off in basketball) and players try to catch or tip the ball away from the other to catch and gain control of the ball. Use larger ball if necessary.

Pressure Point - Pair up and start the point with a drop hit. Players play the point and they count how many times the ball goes over the net. When the point ends, the winner of the point gets as many points as the number of times the ball went over the net. For example, if Player A and B start a point and the ball travels 8 times over the net before one misses and Player A wins the point, then it's 8-0 for Player A. If on the next point the ball crosses the net 27 times and Player B wins, then the score is 27-8. Play to 50, 100 or more, depending on time and skill level.

5 Sets of 5 - Cooperation Game - Pair up. If two pairs are sharing a court, the serve is straight ahead and all play is on a half court with an invisible line drawn from the Center Mark to the "T". Player A starts with an overhead serve to Player B. If the players are novice, consider having them serve from 60' or the service line. Once ball is in play, they attempt to cooperatively rally 5 balls. If accomplished, Player B stops the ball because has earned 1 set! Then, Player B returns to the predetermined "baseline", and begins another set with an overhead serve. If the players do not rally five in a row, Player A serves again until they are successful. First team to reach 5 sets wins! Game can be played cross court as well but is somewhat of a safety issue in "race mode". For this variation consider having the players stagger/alternate the points. When appropriate, increase the intensity by playing 10 sets of 10.

Deep Desperation - A doubles "Champion Team" is positioned on the baseline and a "Challenger Team" is at the net with their racquets touching the net. Waiting teams are paired up and in a line at the net post. A player or coach feeds a lob over the Challenger Team at the net. They then must run back, track it down, and hit it back across the net to start the point. The team that wins the point either takes over, or stays, on the Champion's side of the net. Champion Teams that win points earn a point for their overall score. Which ever pair earns the most points within the time allotted wins the game. This is a great game to teach doubles communication and movement so take advantage of those "coaching moment" opportunities.

Dingles - With four players on one court, have the players start two independent, down-the-line singles rallies. When someone misses (one singles rally ends), that player (and others) yells "Dingles" signaling all four players to play a double point with the ball that remains in play. Keep score by ones. First team to win X # of points wins.

4 Close the Door - In a singles or doubles match, the returner/returning team attempts to return (rally) 4 balls in a row over the net and inside the lines. If/when this is accomplished, they win the game over! This forces the server/serving team to close out the point early and places more emphasis on getting the first serve in!

Bonus Ball - Within a normal singles/doubles match, each server/serving team has a special colored/marked ball. This ball is worth 2 points when served into play and the point is won by the server only. The bonus ball can only be used once per game.

Grand Theft Tennis - Best w/ large groups (8+). This is a good singles game that encourages volleying and hitting the ball deep. 2 or more courts are in play at a time. One side (north for example) has one player on each court. These solo players are the returners. The servers are on the south side of the

court taking turns playing singles against the returners on any court once it is available. All players begin the game with 10 points. If a server wins a point, they take the returner's place on the north side and add one point to their total. If the returner wins the point, they stay on the north side and add one point to their total and a new server/challenger steps up to play. But, if ANY player wins the point by hitting a volley winner, they "steal" all the points from the other player and add those points to their total. Play to a predetermined number of points (50, 75, 100).

And One - Play a game to a predetermined "Target Number" of points (4,8,10,?) First person to get to that Target Number" hasn't won the game quite yet! They have to win one more point to seal the deal (and one) allowing the player behind a chance to come back and gain some momentum. To increase pressure, once a player is at the Target Number" allow the trailing player earn 2 or more points for every 1 (without exceeding the Target Number). If they end up tied at the Target Number, it's sudden death.

Back Up - Similar to "And One". When a player gets to game point and doesn't win it....they "Back Up" their score (lose points) to a predetermined number. 0, 2, 4?

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Intro – Hello!

Today is 99% live ball drills because:

- I am a coach looking for coaching moments. I don't want to be trapped behind a basket and not circulate through my players
- Players need live ball “reps” (Jenny Finch vs Albert Pujols)
- Live ball generally is more fun! Skate Parks for example. USOC
- 4 things kids hate about tennis 1) Standing in Line 2) Picking Up balls 3) Being yelled at by the coach 4) Shadow Swinging
- 70% kids quit youth sports by age 13 – some studies say more.
- 80% say they want to quit and wish it were more fun!
- What is fun? Friends, exercise, learning new skills.....winning
- Kids like their coach before they like the sport

We will be active today!. We will use 36' courts so we can accommodate more players so you can experience the games 1st hand. So everything you see can and should be used on the full sized court. But, that does not mean that you can use a 36" and 60" court with your best players.....

1. Break One - Mental Toughness

- Look the part
- Fake it 'til you make it
- Physical Actions
- Rituals

2. Break Two - Stats, Facts, and Figures

- Critique Sandwich – but still, never immediately after a match
- Praise effort
- Science of reaction time – we all have the same response time....it's just that players that have had the 10,000 hours of “reps” can anticipate better
- Serve – Most important shot, least practiced

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Athletic Skills –

No Racquet

- Partner Pass
- Ball Juggling/dribbling/Tippy Toes/Canadian Golf/Circles
- Belly Button Ball
- Touchdown Pass
- Call my Name
- Ball Drop
- Tunnel Ball
- Team Tunnel Ball
- Monster Town
- Frogs
- Team Keep Away (Pairs)
- Treasure Tag
- Tug of War

With Racquets

- Racquet Quickness
- Big Bad Ball – Tag game where the players with big balls exchange for a little ball once they tag someone. Players w/ big balls at end lose.
- Hardest Game in the World (pairs – server taps ball w/ 3 bounces, returner catches on strings no hands)

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Drills/Games –

Skill Development

- Flipper Tennis
- Beach Ball Rally
- Topspin Dink

Competition Based (Mountain GOAT – Peak or in rock pile)

- Throw ball - 1 racquet and 1 thrower
- Back Up/Pressure Point
- And One
- Grand Theft Tennis
- Bonus Ball
- Pressure Point
- Lobbers and Robbers
- Deep Desperation

Cooperative

- 10 sets of 10
- Volley Trap

Incentive Tennis –

5 Alive – Must win the point by the fifth shot (Goal: Set up point

Bonus Ball – (Value of each point) Different color ball used by server at their discretion

2 = 1 – Players must win 2 consecutive points to earn 1.

Grand Theft Tennis – Play points (standard or in king of the court fashion). Out right winners (volleys, groundies w/ topspin...) earn all the points the opponent had. Play to 50, 100....

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Team Based –

- Lobster Trap
- ½ Lb Lobster
- Battle Cones
- Tweeners

Fun Games

- Wipe Out Speed Round

If there is time.....

Dingles

Champs of the Court