

# Orange Ball Tennis

Considerations and activities for developing orange ball players.

## Orange demands of the game

Unlike at the Red level, the bigger Orange Court means that there will often not be the opportunity to arrive and hit from a static or perfectly balanced position.

## Players now:

- Must be able to hit from a dynamic position
- Must learn to hit off either foot
- Need to move better laterally, more shots hit from a semi open stance
- More forward and back movement needed

## Orange – tactical awareness

### **Players should now be developing:**

- Better understanding of court geometry
- Understanding of when to attack and defend
- Use of space by changing the depth and angle of shots
- Ability to link shots to form patterns of play

## Orange – technical skills

### **Skills now need to be based on:**

- Making the ball move faster and create more spin to control the ball
- Using grips that better facilitate spin and allow for greater racket head speed
- Using the kinetic chain
- Better use of shoulder rotation from a semi open stance
- Reception of the faster ball
- Contacting the serve at a higher position and develop a more rhythmic and coordinated throwing action

## Reception Drills for Orange Level Players

### Drill 1: Readiness

- **Cue:** "Bounce – Hit"
- **Purpose:** Enhance players' ability to anticipate and prepare for an incoming ball.
- **Instructions:** Player's call "Bounce" and should have a unit turn done before the bounce on their side, then call "Hit" each time they contact the ball
- **Side skill:** This also helps players with concentration.

### Drill 2: Direction Detection

- **Cue:** "Left" or "Right"
- **Purpose:** Train players to anticipate the lateral direction of the ball.
- **Instructions:** Upon the ball's approach, players call out "Left" or "Right" depending on the direction of the incoming ball, preparing them to move and position effectively.
- **Side skill:** Players can begin initiate early preparation.

### Drill 3: Depth Perception

- **Cue:** "Short" or "Deep"
- **Purpose:** Train players to quickly identify the depth of incoming balls.
- **Instructions:** As early as possible (as the ball crosses the net), players call out "Short" if they think the ball will land inside the service line or "Deep" if they think it will go beyond.
- **Side skill:** Forward and backward movement improves.

### Drill 4: Height Awareness

- **Cue:** "High" or "Low"
- **Purpose:** Improve players' response to the trajectory of the ball.
- **Instructions:** Players must identify and vocalise "High" if the opponent has hit a high looping ball, or "Low" if the opponent has hit a flatter lower ball.
- **Side skill:** Links well into the next ball characteristic of speed identification

### Drill 5: Speed Recognition

- **Cue:** "Fast" or "Slow"
- **Purpose:** Enhance reaction time to different speeds of the ball.
- **Instructions:** Players assess and call out "Fast" for speedy shots and "Slow" for slower ones as soon the opponent hits the ball, (as early as they can identify)
- **Side skill:** Develops learning opportunities for backswing length (fast/short or slow/bigger preparation)

### Drill 6: Spin Identification

- **Cue:** "Top" or "Slice"
- **Purpose:** Develop the ability to recognize and prepare for spin.
- **Instructions:** Players announce "Top" when they detect topspin and "Slice" for backspin, aiding them in adjusting their preparation accordingly.
- **Side skill:** Visual cues from the opponent can be detected (opponents set up for a slice or a topspin stroke)

## **Skill Builders for Orange ball players**

### **Ping Pong:**

- Players in pairs.
- Players must bounce the ball down onto their side of the court and attempt to get it over the net to start the point, then continue the rally as normal.
- Great for contact point and grip development.
- If players can't do it with their racket, they can do it with a throw (into the ground).

### **Body Tennis:**

- Players in pairs.
- Players allowed three touches of the ball.
- At least one touch must be with a body part.
- The player can send the ball back with 1, 2 or 3 touches as long the body is included at least once.

### **Double Swing:**

- Players in pairs.
- Players rally but must take a double swing before they hit the ball.
- A full shadow swing and then normal stroke (to hit the ball)
- Great for developing reading and reaction skills.

### **Double Bounce:**

- Players in pairs.
- Players rally but the ball must bounce twice.
- Great for developing reading and movement skills.

### **Top and Slice:**

- Players in pairs
- Players rally but alternate between hitting topspin and slice shots.
- Players should also call out the spin they will use.
- A control touch can be used if necessary.

## Activities for Orange ball players

### Prisoner

- The attacker starts with a ball and stands on a marker in either the forehand or backhand corner.
- The defender (prisoner) starts in line with the attacker on the opposite baseline.
- The attacker must serve / feed / throw the ball into the open court.
- The prisoner can pick up their racket and move when the attacker throws the ball.
- The prisoner must try and get the ball back.
- Play out the point, first to 7 and then rotate.

### Attack & Defend

- Players are in pairs - One is the attacker; one is the defender.
- The attacker must keep the ball outside the lines (created by the coach)
- The defender must keep the ball inside the lines (created by the coach)
- Play first to 7, then rotate positions.

### No Go Zone

- The court is marked out into zones. Mark out as many or as few zones as you wish.
- Each player can place a cone into one zone – which the opponent needs to avoid.
- Players now can't hit the ball into the marked zone.
- Players play points and lose if they hit the ball onto the marked zone.

### Shark Tank

- Coach marks out the shark tank.
- Shark tank created to encourage players to push their opponents back off the baseline.
- Players play points in a both-back situation.
- The aim is for each player to try to push their opponent into the shark tank. (1 meter behind baseline for example)
- If a player steps into the tank, they lose the point.

## 4 Constraints Led Approach Sessions for Orange ball tennis.

*Individual – Task – Environment. We create the problems; players find the solutions.*

### Session 1: Dynamic Position Play

**Objective:** Improve players' ability to hit from dynamic positions and off either foot.

**Introduction:** Explain the importance of dynamic movement in larger courts. Open and Closed stances can be discussed if appropriate.

**Warm-Up:** Agility drills emphasising dynamic balance and quick foot adjustments.

#### Main Activity:

**Objective:** Players hit while being moved around by the opponent, focusing on adjusting their balance and hitting from either foot.

#### Direction Detection

- "Left" or "Right"
- Train players to anticipate the lateral direction of the ball.
- Upon the ball's approach, players call out "Left" or "Right" depending on the direction of the incoming ball, preparing them to move and position effectively.
- **Side skill:** Players can begin initiate early preparation.

#### Prisoner

- The attacker stands on a marker in either the forehand or backhand corner.
- The defender (prisoner) starts in line with the attacker on the opposite baseline.
- The attacker must serve / feed / throw the ball into the open court.
- The prisoner can pick up their racket and move when the attacker throws the ball.
- The prisoner must try and get the ball back.
- Play out the point, first to 7 and then rotate.

#### Coaching notes:

- Encourage 'closed / neutral stance' for Player 2 if they get to the ball with plenty of time.
- Encourage 'open stance' for Player 2 when appropriate.

**Modified Game:** Play points where the point starts only after moving outside a marked zone around them, encouraging movement before each shot.

**Cool Down / Reflection:** Discuss how movement affects shot quality and review key movements that can help in maintaining balance.

## Session 2: Speed and Spin Development

**Objective:** Enhance the ability to control the ball with speed and spin.

**Introduction:** Overview of how spin affects ball trajectory and speed.

**Warm-Up:** Related to the session ahead where possible

### Main Activity:

**Objective:** Players hit while trying to alternate between hitting groundstrokes with topspin and slice

### Spin Identification

- "Top" or "Slice"
- Develop the ability to recognize and prepare for spin.
- Players announce "Top" when they detect topspin and "Slice" for backspin, aiding them in adjusting their preparation accordingly.
- **Side skill:** Visual cues from the opponent can be detected (opponents set up for a slice or a topspin stroke)

### Attack & Defend – attackers play topspin, defenders play slice

- Players are in pairs - One is the attacker; one is the defender.
- The attacker must keep the ball outside the lines (created by the coach)
- The defender must keep the ball inside the lines (created by the coach)
- Play first to 7, then rotate positions.

**Modified Game:** Rally where players score extra points for using designated spins successfully to win points.

**Cool Down / Reflection:** Feedback on improving spin control and speed management.

### Session 3: Tactical Play and Court Geometry

**Objective:** Improve understanding of court geometry to enhance tactical play.

**Introduction:** Discuss the importance of court awareness and tactical decision-making.

**Warm-Up:** Dynamic movements across the court to simulate match play positioning.

#### **Main Activity:**

**Objective:** Players learn when it is a good idea to defend, neutralise or attack.

#### **Depth Perception**

- "Short" or "Deep"
- Train players to quickly identify the depth of incoming balls.
- As early as possible (as the ball crosses the net), players call out "Short" if they think the ball will land inside the service line or "Deep" if they think it will go beyond.
- **Side skill:** Forward and backward movement improves.

#### **Positional Drills:**

- Players play shots from various positions, focusing on attacking and defending roles.
- Players rally or play points where they call Red (defend), Orange (neutralise) or Green (attack) dependant on where they are on the court and the type of ball they receive.
- **Drill progression ideas:**
- If player calls Green and wins the point within 2 shots, they get bonus points.
- If a players calls Red, then correctly calls Green, and wins the point on the Green shot they get bonus points (transition from defence to attack)

**Modified Game:** Point play with areas of the court marked for different tactical objectives (e.g., zones where only defensive shots are allowed).

**Cool Down / Reflection:** Discuss the impact of court positioning and shot selection on match outcomes.

## Session 4: Serve and Return

**Objective:** Develop serving tactics / techniques and improve return of serve.

**Introduction:** Importance of a tactical serving along with effective return tactics.

**Warm-Up:** Run around throw, return, and play drill.

### Main Activity:

#### Speed Recognition – off Serve & Return

- "Fast" or "Slow"
- Enhance reaction time to different speeds of the ball.
- Players assess and call out "Fast" for speedy shots and "Slow" for slower ones as soon the opponent hits the ball, (as early as they can identify)
- **Side skill:** Develops learning opportunities for backswing length (fast or slow preparation)

#### Serve & Return Drills

##### Serve focus:

- Service box is split in two, big target areas for 'wide' and 'T' serves.
- If the player successfully serves into the designated area and follows up by eventually winning the point, they receive bonus points.

##### Return focus:

- Return area is split into zones, (angle or deep etc)
- If the player successfully returns into the designated area and follows up by eventually winning the point, they receive bonus points.

**Modified Game:** Serve and return games where players must pre call specific serve locations or return locations to win bonus points.

**Cool Down / Reflection:** Review the different tactical options available on serve and return.

***These session plans are designed to develop the specific skills needed at the Orange level while also encouraging players to think and adapt their strategies based on game-like constraints.***