



Head start

Teach Tennis International is a comprehensive teaching curriculum aimed at coaches delivering mini tennis programmes for five to 12-year-olds



Oren Holtzman and Andy Kemp, co-founders of TTI

The Westway Sports Centre has long been a hive of sporting activity, but there is a new sense of purpose among the tennis players at the West London facility. Much of the credit for the passion that you can sense around the

courts there goes to Oren Holtzman and Andy Kemp, co-founders of Teach Tennis International (TTI).

Holtzman and Kemp have developed a programme which uses the fundamentals of technique, strategy and tactics to enable players between the ages of five and 12 to develop their tennis skills. In essence this is a teaching syllabus for coaches. Through a series of 108 lesson plans and 3,000 video clips, it allows coaches to focus their energy on coaching through a structured programme aimed at young players experiencing the red, orange and green stages of mini tennis.

The programme, which sits in paper format in front of Andy Kemp as we talk at Westway, has recently been transferred to a digital platform. Kemp, the author of the syllabus, and Holtzman, the more business-focused of the pair, explain with a passion how Teach Tennis International came into being.

Both are coaches who met when they were working for Win Tennis – Holtzman at Westway and Kemp at Bisham. Seeking to improve the performance of the coaches at Westway, Kemp suggested writing a series of lesson plans that the coaches could follow to deliver tennis to the growing number of youngsters playing the game there.

Ten years ago Westway was a designated LTA High Performance Centre, with eight performance players and

250 lower-level youngsters, but Holtzman and Kemp realised this was not sustainable. They wanted to get more youngsters playing good tennis by the age of 12, even if they did not reach performance level.

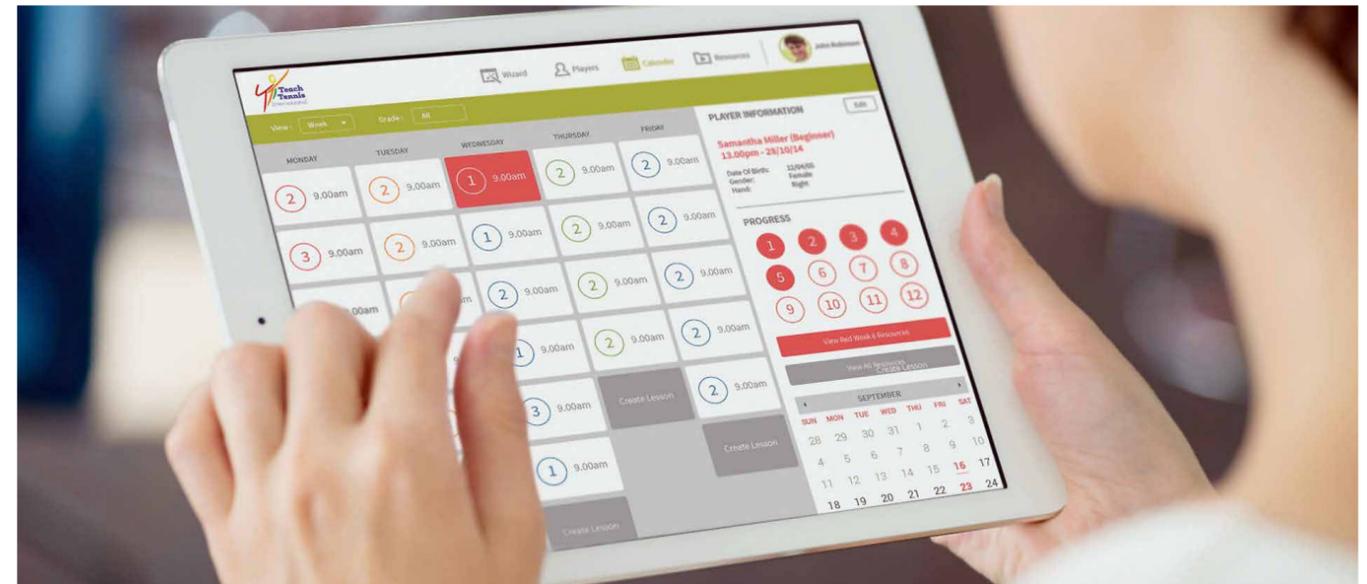
Kemp had already begun to offer themes for lessons to his coaches, but with the encouragement of Holtzman he wrote a draft of the curriculum, which is a 12-week programme for each level of mini tennis. Each class lasts one hour, is based on a system of repetition and is rooted in the end objective of producing a 12-year-old tennis player with a rounded skill set.

“As a coach you don’t get a lot of time with the kids you are working with because they are doing so many other things,” Kemp said. “So you need to make sure that technical, tactical and physical things are taken care of within every session to maximise the time you get with those kids. If you are giving a player good foundations technically, tactically and physically, then you are also giving them ownership of their skills.”

Each lesson contains drills, which a coach is encouraged to customise, and a detailed lesson plan. The sessions build over the weeks, providing continuity of teaching and giving the youngsters and their parents a clear pathway for development.

Kemp and Holtzman say the programme makes coaching simple. With a lesson plan in place, coaches are free to use their energy on court, giving attention to the players and in particular to individuals within a group. “For me the true sign of a good coach is one who can work a group and work with the individuals within the group as if he is giving an individual lesson,” Kemp said.

One of the key fundamentals of the course is its continuous assessments, which also allow parents to understand how their child is progressing and to ensure the player masters one part before progressing upwards. The Mini Tennis Award System (MITAS) is an integral part of the programme.



On the rise 1400 youngsters are now in the tennis programme at Westway

FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER IN SPORT, AND IN TENNIS SPECIFICALLY, YOU HAVE A CURRICULUM IN HOW TO COACH

Although the programme was developed five years ago and has been used by Holtzman and Kemp at Westway, it was never developed with a view to selling it as a product. However, the results at Westway were impressive. The coaches enjoyed using the plans and the number of youngsters playing there increased from 250 to 1,400.

Holtzman said that annual revenues last year from Westway’s eight courts rose to £1.23m, an average of £125,000 per court, a level almost unheard of within the industry. Everyone Active, which now runs Westway Sports, is licensing the Teach Tennis International Programme for the first time this year. It will run across seven courts.

The Spanish tennis federation has been running a pilot programme in Madrid for the past six months and is preparing to roll out the programme regionally.

In the past development of young Spanish players has happened at club level, but the federation is becoming more involved. The TTI programme has been adapted for the Spanish. At their request, for example, the programme has been extended to cover players up to the age of 14.

“The Spanish federation have recognised that tennis players don’t just appear any more,” Kemp said. “Tennis players are developed, so making sure the base have the skills necessary to play the game at whatever level they wish, and to give them the skills to enable them to stay in the game, is recognised as massively important.”

Recent conversations have taken place with a company in Hong Kong which is interested in licensing the product and selling it to clubs. Holtzman says 2018 will be a year of taking the product to market.

The development of the digital platform taught the founders a lot about business. Finding – eventually – the right digital partner has put them in a position to sell the product and the app to clubs and federations. “We didn’t set about this to make money,” Holtzman said. “We wanted to see the level of players and coaching improve in our programme.”

Andrew Jarrett, the Wimbledon referee, and Peter McCraw, a developmental performance coach and former head of development at the IMG Academy in Florida, are among those who have been advising the pair, who have investors behind them and are ready to move on to the next stage. teachtennis.net