

Coaching Special Olympics Tennis: Training Session on 4/11/22

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Topic: How to work more effectively with special athletes who have particularly challenging issues with focus, coordination, and communication

1. Focus on each individual's potential – start and build from ability, not disability

(ask teacher and assistants about the athlete's abilities)

- ..ambulate, walk, run, skip, jump
- ..verbal skills, listening, reaction/feedback (facial expression, other expression)
- ..grip, sway, swing, turn, imitation/mimicking -- spatial awareness – “Simon Says...”
- ..balance, coordination, bending, strength, etc.

2. Redefine success: we *happen to be* on a tennis court, but “tennis” is an opportunity for...

- ..inclusion, self-esteem
- ..engagement of any sort, connect
- ..gleam in eye
- ..swinging is good, mimicking is good, moving is good
- ..functional gains
- ..learning *any part* of swing technique, footwork technique
- ..“fun”, but fun is a means to an end – end is achievement and functional gains

3. Set a goal, optimal challenge for this athlete, not necessarily a “tennis” goal

- ..SPORT INSPIRES DESIRE FOR HIGHER ACHIEVEMENT, motivational

4. Examples

Accessories: chalk, pucks/scrap racquet, small racquet, soccer ball, cones as goals, buckets, paddle, raceclock, spongeballs, “net-racquet” catching device, misc. targets

- ..alternate racquet positions for swinging – experiment with...
- ..static racquet position – value of open/angled-up position
- ..connecting – rhythm – drum, count etc. (coach experiment – open, then close eyes – 1-2-hit)
- ..modified “walk and hit” – walk and roll/golf/hockey
- ..use buckets, cones to set a movement goal, pickup goal, go/move balls from A->B
- ..hand vs racquet – palm up/racquet up, etc. (small racquet or paddle)
- ..throw/catch
- ..hopscotch (court chalk with permission off main playing area, spots, agility ladder)
- ..serve (complex skill example --- break it down – any part is inclusion, success)
- ..soccer, hockey
- ..mobility drill – group challenge, log scores, improve footwork and retest – group rooting!