

TENNIS at Pretoria Country Club



Tennis: the inner secret of sports vision

Physical fitness, strength, commitment to training and proper nutrition all contribute to top performance. – Claude Mastromatteo

Tennis coaches play a vital role in developing court-craft skills that ultimately lead to mastery of the game. Basic techniques and drills to develop and improve various strokes, (topspin, slice, spins, play-angles, and depth), footwork positioning, swing patterns, racquet choices, grip choices, weight, size, string type, and tension are all included in this process. Physical fitness, strength, commitment to training, and proper nutrition all contribute to top performance. Competitive tennis players strive to achieve a powerful and versatile game ability based on solid groundstrokes, a dictating serve, a confident net game, a sharp return game, and specialty shots for every situation. A blueprint for success in winning more singles or doubles matches.

Most athletes, however, don't realise the central role that visual skills play in sports achievement. A top performing tennis player requires neuro-visual responses that are dynamic, precise and fully aligned every time, throughout the game.

Examples of some behavioural responses and experiences deriving from an inefficient or inaccurate visual system:

- Difficulty following the trajectory path of an approaching ball
- Difficulty seeing the ball clearly at distance or when approaching at near
- Hitting the ball late or slow to respond to a volley shot during net-play
- Mis-hitting an easy overhead smash
- Over or underestimating the distance, speed and spin of an approaching ball
- Difficulty making the "shot", "pass" or "play"
- Performance during competitive matches or social tennis deteriorates late in the game or under stress
- Prone to repeating similar mistakes
- Inconsistent performance

Overall muscular coordination is founded on the functioning of an efficient visual system, able to transmit accurate visual inputs to the brain for interpretation, decision making and the execution of an appropriate visual-motor response. Simply put, sport is all about the visual component; the eyes see, the brain interprets and leads, and the body follows. Vision directs the intelligent movement of the body (the eyes lead the body). The more accurate the visual system can take in and process visual information, the more accurate it can direct appropriate motor movement.

Vision is way more than how well you're able to read letters off a Snellen chart at 6 metres! Having 6/6 vision does not count for much if you're unable to track a ball accurately with your eyes or anticipate where your opponent is headed. If you cannot intercept the play and turn it around, how are you going to succeed? Coaches and athletes need to keep in mind that visual processing by the brain is prone to errors.

Incorrect or poorly timed responses are what hold back good athletes from becoming great. Even with the best coaching and tactics, sports performance can suffer if not properly honed. Bad habits need to be reversed, while positive skills need to be nurtured.

Foundational visual skills that tennis players rely on for optimum sports performance

- **Eye-hand-body coordination:** the eyes and limbs working together to accurately perceive the flight of the tennis ball, positioning of the feet after the split-step and preparation of the dominant arm position to make proper contact with the ball.
- **Depth perception:** an accurate assessment and spatial judgement of the speed and distance of a moving tennis ball approaching a player.
- **Eye tracking:** the ability to follow a moving object accurately, such as tracking a fast-moving tennis ball that your opponent has just served to you.
- **Eye teaming:** the eyes working together so that the tennis ball can be perceived singly.
- **Peripheral vision:** seeing to each side while looking forward and not moving your head, e.g tracking the flight of the ball after your opponent's serve and simultaneously perceiving your opponent's partner at the net during play.
- **Visualisation:** envisioning the success you desire; or visualising how and where you anticipate playing your next tennis shot.

- **Enhanced peripheral awareness:** detecting that your opponent at the net has sneaked slightly closer to the middle-court area after his / her partner's serve.
- **Visual discrimination:** one's ability to discriminate visual detail, e.g., noticing that your opponent has switched his / her hand grip position on the racquet just before serving (from continental to western grip).
- **Vision-balance integration:** balance relies on vision and most aspects of sports performance can be improved with better balance.
- **Visual reaction time:** the time-interval it takes from the time you visually perceive an approaching ball to the time of contact. A serve delivered at 200km/h towards you requires a much faster reaction time response, as opposed to when facing an overhead lob which gives you more time to prepare for the shot.
- **Dynamic visual acuity:** to see the ball while in motion, clearly.
- **Focusing:** rapidly changing focus from near, and far and vice-versa, such as a quick transition from observing the ball at the toss during the serve (near focus) to the landing position after serve, or alternatively focusing on the ball when receiving serve from the time it leaves the server's racquet to the time contact is made with it on the return of serve.
- **Contrast Sensitivity:** the ability to perceive the tennis ball as the focal object against various coloured court surfaces or backgrounds well enough for optimal contact. Varying light conditions affect contrast sensitivity and visual performance. Play during dusk conditions reduces one's ability to see the ball clearly. Visually tracking a moving yellow tennis ball across a dark green coloured court surface is easier to follow because of the higher contrast between them as opposed to tracking the same ball, lobbed against the glare of white sky background – no wonder the frequent miss hits!



TENNIS MEMORIES at Pretoria Country Club



Taking a break between sets
Donne, Andy, Luan and Claude



Annemieke, Teri, Amelia and Delphine



Best of friends,
Gordon and Pierre



Lukas, Dave, Carine and Nic ready for a good game



Antoinette and Elsabe enjoying cake
and tea on a Saturday afternoon



Keen players: Kerneels, Schalk,
Alfred and Theunis



Winners of the Captain's Cup March 2021
Lloyd Birrell and Gordon Hart



The finals of the Captain's Cup: Lloyd Birrell,
Gordon Hart, Piet Marais and Kerneels Lowe



The ladies: Jenni, Teri, Karin, Jenny, Delphine,
Elsabe and Donn 



The 3 musketeers Dave, Brent and Paul



Tim & Moonyeen with our Tennis
Captain Louis Marais



The pizza chefs, Claude Mastromatteo
and Nic Duneas



Jon Brandon Bloch



Wednesday evening tennis is fast becoming a highlight for the week



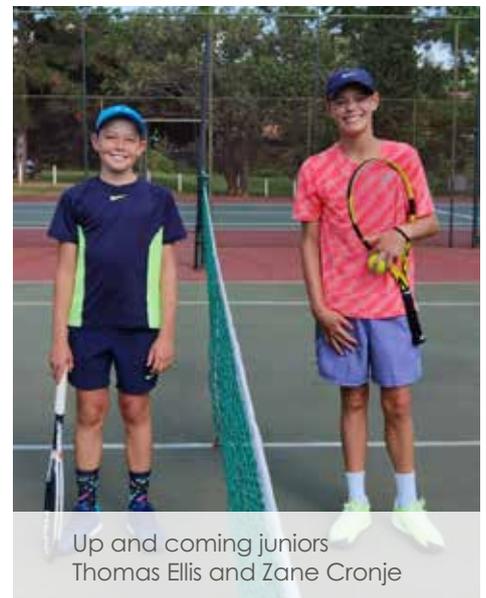
Welcome to the Basson Family



Celebrating the Captain's Cup
Marius, Gordon, Donne, Karin, Lloyd, Louis and Brent



Coach Dino Pavlou with the kids



Up and coming juniors
Thomas Ellis and Zane Cronje