

It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint!

Player Passports and Levels in Junior Tennis Explained

by Leinster Tennis Performance Development Officer Stephen Nugent

Many parents have questions about the details and criteria for the Tennis 10s levels; the Player Passport; when it is granted, and why. Here, in a nutshell, is everything you need to know!

For a number of years now, a standardised, systematic progression of court sizes, balls and racquets has been in place to scale the game of tennis appropriately for young players.

The power of this scaled system is that it allows players to develop with specific equipment to aid success, and to learn to improve and work towards transitioning to the next level and ultimately a full court and regular tennis balls.

The developmental tools of this system use different colours and densities of balls, as well as varying court sizes.

Each category has different levels, and to move from one level to the next players need to play a certain number of matches. (Have a look at the end of this article for details on Tennis 10s Record Cards).

The Goldilocks Formula

Great coaching works with the individual's strengths of each young player, and the steady step by step progression of their skills and abilities is vital to maintain a love of the game; great morale and a sense of achievement.

Challenges should be made with what I call 'the Goldilocks Formula' in mind – not too much; not too little, but ***just right*** for each player.

Enjoyment of the game must lie at the heart of everything, as if players aren't having fun, then all the technical ability or fantastic coaching in the world becomes irrelevant. It would be a shame to see a child turned off tennis by being rushed or made to feel inadequate. We must allow them to progress at a pace that works best for them.

Maintaining a sense of accomplishment, earned success and steady improvement is the goal of all good tennis training. Abilities and technical skills can be taught, but the right development, advancement and nurturing of young players, at the right time for every individual, is paramount.

If development is too slow, good players get bored and feel under challenged; moving up too soon can lead them to lose matches; lose confidence and lose heart. In an ever-more competitive arena, keeping the balance right is at the core of optimising young player ability.

Determining their level and working with them to excel comfortably within that appropriate level is far more important than trying to sprint to the next colour ball or the next level up.

Being over-ambitious with a player is actually counterproductive, as they suddenly find themselves outpaced or ill-equipped to deal with a challenge presented too soon.

This is something that all parents should be aware of, as although the idea of a child moving up quickly may seem appealing, it can do more harm in the long run.

Every young player deserves the time spent on him or her to ensure they are correctly assimilating information; adjusting their technique and performance accordingly, and are confident in doing so before they move to the next level. This is what gives them the strong foundation and ingrains the sound fundamentals of the game.

Psychological Development and Tennis

Aside from the terrific physical benefits of tennis, playing the game at the right level helps children develop positive personality characteristics useful off-court too.

- Practice and hard work reinforces the value of effort and persistence
- Honing skills and controlling pace of play provides excellent self-discipline
- Learning to play within current abilities allows for healthy mistake management and improvement
- Preparation for competition and handling win – or losses! - with grace and honour
- Effective management of stress and adversity with adjustment for each empowers children
- True sportsmanship and fair play are great life lessons
- Teamwork; social and communicative skills stay with them for life.

If we overload children with too much, too soon, they will lose their zest for the sport and all of the above benefits will be lost to them.

Why are Player Passports granted?

When players are trained as individuals within a formulised, tailored coaching program to optimise their results, in some cases players may have what it takes to compete at the next level up.

In this instance, Tennis Ireland may grant players who have developed the required technical skills at Under 8; Under 9 and Under 10 levels a 'Player Passport' to compete in competitions above their level; that is Under 9; Under 10 and Under 12 respectively.

To be granted a Player Passport to compete at a higher level, the Leinster players need to meet the following criteria:

- Leinster players must have achieved exceptional competition results within their own age groups (for instance, at Orange level for U9 players).
- The player has reached the required technical and tactical competence at the respective Red, Orange or Green stage during competition.
- The Regional Coach working with the talented children of his/her region is of the opinion that the child is ready for the progression and makes a recommendation to the Technical Director of Tennis Ireland.

A Collaborative Approach

In deciding to grant Player Passports, a collaborative approach is used.

One of reasons for involving the Regional Coach and the Technical Director in the process of granting passports is to avoid a situation where a coach may feel under pressure to agree with a parent of a player that he or she is ready to play full court.

Consideration will be given to players working outside the Tennis Ireland system if the private coach presents a good case to the Regional Squad Coach.

The Technical Director of Tennis Ireland will have the final say on the issue of passports to all players.

Stay or Play: What's Right for the Player?

The whole concept of tailored development is to make sure that everything is right for the player.

There will of course be players, depending on their ability, who will need to remain in the modified game for a longer period than we have stated in our policy.

We would far rather a player gets the time and training they need to build their core competencies to succeed, than to over-reach too soon and fail.

Coaches and clubs volunteers should work with parents and advise when children are ready to advance to a different court size and ball. It's this collaborative approach and the synergy of everyone who wants the best for each child that makes happy, successful players.

I hope this article helps everyone to understand the purpose of the developmental tools we use, and how important it is to support our young players in their ongoing evolution.

I look forward to seeing everyone over this winter season – wrap up warm and keep on training!

Best Wishes,

Stephen.

Tennis10s Record Cards

The Mini-Midi Circuit has 3 different tournament categories:

- **RED:** played on a Red size court (11x5.5m) with a red ball and aimed at 7 year old players on 31st December of the previous year or younger
- **ORANGE:** played on an Orange size court (18x6.5m) with an orange ball for players age 8 on the 31st December of the previous year
- **GREEN:** played on a FULL size court using a slightly softer ball (green) for players age 9 on the 31st December of the previous year

Each category has 4 different levels (1, 2, 3 and 4).

Players get a **RED**, **ORANGE** or **GREEN** Record Card (depending on your age) Level 4. To move from one level to the next you must play a certain number of matches:

- From Level 4 to 3: Play 10 matches
- From Level 3 to 2: Play 25 matches (for **RED** just 20 matches)
- From Level 2 to 1 **ORANGE** and **GREEN:** Win 10 matches against Level 1 or 2 players
- From Level 2 to 1 **RED:** 20 matches

Only matches played in sanctioned Open or Team tournaments count (Singles, doubles or mixed gender). All matches should be signed by referee or captain of the opposite team.

Once a player moves up a Level he/she can't go down. The level helps players and tournament organizers to select which events are likely to be enjoyed best.

According to their level, players may enter:

Player Level	Event Level			
	1	2	3	4
1	✓	✓	✗	✗
2	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	✗	✓	✓	✓
4	✗	✗	✓	✓

What to do:

- A new player will receive a Level 4 card for the relevant age group: You can:
 - apply to Leinster Tennis for one
 - download one from the Leinster Tennis website or
 - collect one at the tournament desk
- Players must update the card regularly: write down the tournament and the opponent's name, the date and ask the tournament organiser to sign off the card.
- Completed level cards must be sent to: *Julie-Anne Hudson, Leinster Tennis, Unit 7 Upper Level, Cranford Centre, Montrose, Dublin 4*
- Leinster Tennis will send the next level card as soon as completed cards are received.
- Lost cards will be replaced once only. Any further requests will incur a charge of €5.

Downloadable Record Cards:

- [Green Level 4](#)
- [Orange Level 4](#)
- [Red Level 4](#)

Extra match cards: to be used when a card is full, must be sent with the standard full card:

- [- Level 1 or 2](#)
- [- Level 3 & 4](#)

How to Apply for a Player Passport

Leinster Tennis Office contact: Julie-Anne Hudson

Phone: 01-2696024

Mobile: 086-0430619

E-mail: info@leinstertennis.ie or to Julie-Anne at jahudson@leinstertennis.ie

In order to guarantee a player is granted a passport for the tournament they wish to play in please ensure that you apply before the following dates:

- Early February 2016 (Easter & pre-Easter tournaments) i.e. - Spring Match plays, etc.
- Early June 2016 (all summer 2016 tournaments)

Please contact the Leinster office (details above) for specific dates and times. It is essential that applications are made within the specified timeframe as it will not be possible to grant players passports to these tournaments after the stated timeframe.