

# ARTICLES ON COMPETITION



## SCORING FORMATS TO SUIT STARTER PLAYERS

(by James Newman, ITF)

People's lifestyles in many nations around the world have changed. They can access what they want, when they want, quicker than before. Whether it's high-speed wireless access, pizza delivered in under 30 minutes or TV on demand – many people are used to quickly fulfilling their needs.

On top of this 'fast' lifestyle, people have less time. They are working longer and have access to more activities (other sports, movies and tv, bars, video games). This means they have busy schedules and don't want long commitments. Parents, on top of their own busy schedules, can have 2 or 3 children who may all have 3 or more activities on a weekend (piano, hockey, basketball, tennis, football etc).



Match these busy lifestyles of players and parents to traditional tennis competition:

- a) Often it takes over 4 hours out of the day
- b) Can be spread over a week, you could be knocked out first round or get through to the final – so you never know which DAY you'll be finished!
- c) There can be a lot of waiting around rather than playing matches

It is clear why, in many nations, not enough people are playing competition– the traditional formats and scoring systems used are very unattractive to children, adults and (most especially) parents.

Tennis must change. Competitions at the 'starter' and 'intermediate' levels of tennis are in much need of an overhaul. We all need to work to make tennis more attractive so that players get to enjoy playing and competing in a way that takes less time, offers more matches and less waiting around and that involves all players for as much of the event as possible.

### SCORING FORMATS WITHIN THE RULES OF TENNIS

The 'Rules of Tennis' include the following rules that can be used to make competition shorter and suitable for players with less time to spare.

#### SHORTS SETS TO 4

Instead of playing first to 6 games, play first to 4 games. At 4 games all, play a tiebreak to 7.

#### THIRD SET MATCH TIEBREAK

Instead of playing 3 full sets, if the score gets to 1 set all an option is to play a match tiebreak as the third set. This can be a tiebreak to 7 or 10 points, the winner of this match tiebreak would win the match 2 sets to 1. This rule can significantly reduce the time needed to complete an event and was recently used at Junior Wimbledon due to bad rain causing matches to get behind schedule.

#### NO 'AD' SCORING

No ad scoring is where, instead of getting to deuce and then advantage (40-40 then Ad-40), you only play one more point. At deuce (40-40) the receiver chooses which side to receive the serve from and the winner of that point wins the game.

The No 'ad' rule prevents long games played at deuce – advantage – deuce – advantage etc and can give more interest as there should be more breaks of serve (especially good for young elite players learning about playing under pressure). With no-ad scoring, it is simply 15-30-40-GAME.

#### NO LET RULE

With the no let rule, serves that hit the net cord and land in are played. Instead of a let being called, the serve is live and the receiver must try to play the return. This rule can add a bit more fun for starter players

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## USING ALL THE RULES TOGETHER

All of the rules mentioned could be used in the same event. You could play Best of 3 short sets to 4 games with the 3<sup>rd</sup> set being a match tiebreak to 10 points. You could use the no 'ad' scoring in games and no let rule for each point.

## ADDITIONAL RULES FOR INFORMAL EVENTS

All of the above will suit many of your players, but for some starter players (especially those who have only recently started playing or in the first stages of competition) matches could still be too long. Below are some extra 'unofficial' rules you could use in less formal competitions to suit these players.



## 1 TIEBREAK

Many formats, especially for young or inexperienced players, can benefit from matches that consist of just 1 tiebreak to 5 or more points. The advantage of this is that:

- The scoring is simple for players to understand
- It takes less time – good for children with short attention spans
- Can play more matches and opponents – good for adult players wanting a social experience
- Scoring is less embarrassing – although player can lose 7-0 in points, this would be less embarrassing for a starter player than losing 6-0 6-0 in a formal event.

## BEST OF 3 TIEBREAKS

Holding many of the same advantages as above, playing best of 3 tiebreaks takes less time and keeps the scoring simple. Great for starter players with busy schedules.

## TIMED MATCHES

Timed matches allow you (the coach) to have total control over when all matches start and finish. This makes it far easier for you to run an event as all players start, finish and change opponent at the same time.

You can use any length of match you want, but a maximum of 15 minutes per match is advised. Scoring can be as in a tiebreak but players keep counting until the time is up.

## NO KNOCKOUTS

Never, never, never should the first competition a starter player plays be a knockout event. How do you think a nervous, inexperienced starter player feels when they hear "You lost first round so now you can go home"? Knockouts are good for experienced, older players but the starter player wants and needs lots of smaller matches against different opponents. There are plenty of 'multi-match' formats at [www.tennisplayandstay.com](http://www.tennisplayandstay.com) that provide starter players with the fun and experience they want.

## SUMMARY

Traditional competition is no good for starter players, it's too long, too serious and often too much pressure. Using the rules above, the competition formats on [www.tennisplayandstay.com](http://www.tennisplayandstay.com) and your own ideas will help to make competition more accessible and enjoyable for starter players.

The perfect starter competition is short, simple and has plenty of matches for ALL players. Are your events like this?