

# IHSTCA Newsletter

## -- Cross Court --

September

2020

Dear Members:

First and most importantly, I hope this email finds you healthy and well.

### Girls Season

Many of you are underway and its awesome we are playing. We held the first sporting event in St Charles Dist. since COVID started back in March on Aug 22, playing both Geneva then Batavia. It was great to be back playing, I think each of us realize how quickly things can be taken away so we have a new appreciation for it.

To the important part of the state series, I have been working with Susie K of the IHSA quite a bit, chatting about both boys and girls. I want to clear up two things...first it was not clear but we will be playing our sectionals and second it will be the following week after most conference tournaments. It is not going to be that later date the IHSA said. Susie and I are planning to chat early next week and I should have little more info then.

### Boys Season

I have received all your concerns regarding the late end date. Please know we are doing everything in our power to change it. I went in on a proposal to the IHSA with the presidents of the baseball softball and track coaches associations that would move our start date to April and end date first week of June. This is just a PROPOSAL more to come but if you know someone on the IHSA advisory committee reach out to me and I will give you more information so you can push it with them as well!

Enjoy each day with your girls because we never know when it will end. One suggestion if you do a senior night do it SOON, in case we are forced to shut down!

As always, please do not hesitate if you have questions to email, to text or to call me.

Sean Masoncup, President  
St. Charles-North

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### State Format

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## IMPORTANT DATES

List of Participants Due	October 13, 2020
Sectional Seeding Meeting	October 14, 2020
Sectionals	October 17-18, 2020
Season Ends	October 31, 2020

## OPEN POSITIONS

**Lincoln Park High School** is looking for a Girls Assistant for the 2020 - 2021 season. Please email resumes to [ecromer@cps.edu](mailto:ecromer@cps.edu).

**Trinity High School** has a job opening for Girls Head Varsity Coach and Girls JV Coach for fall 2020. Contact Trinity Athletic Director, Rachel Meiner at 708-453-8394 or [rmeiner@trinityhs.org](mailto:rmeiner@trinityhs.org)

**Wheaton St. Francis College Prep** is looking for a JV2 Coach for the Fall 2020 Girls season. Please contact Head Varsity Coach Tom Castronovo: [tcastronov@aol.com/630-336-0243](mailto:tcastronov@aol.com/630-336-0243)



## MAKING PRACTICE COUNT

*by Dave Lipe*

*Dave Lipe is the head coach at Edwardsville High School. He is an IHSTCA board member and sits on the Ethics Committee.*

Former IHSTCA President Carrie Watson asked me to write something about coaching high school tennis, and, while I know that after 26 years I still have A LOT to learn, one thing I do know is that practice is REALLY important. It seems obvious to some coaches and players, and yet I have seen time and time again, players and coaches who treat practice time as if it were some superfluous event that happens between events. It's not; practice time is sacred to me, and if we've had any success at Edwardsville High School during my tenure, I attribute much of it to the time I share with my assistant coaches and players developing players during practice.

"Practice doesn't make perfect; perfect practice makes perfect," is one of my favorite sayings. In other words, just because players and coaches are on the court, doesn't mean anyone is getting better, which is the point: everyone should be there each day to improve. At EHS, players set goals daily to improve physically, mentally/emotionally, tactically, and technically. I learned a long time ago that neglecting one of these aspects means that potentially one is stifling the overall development of the player. We've all known players who were fit, technically solid, and knew extensively about shot selection, but if they were emotionally erratic, that they had little chance to win against players of equal or similar abilities. Therefore, at each practice, I view it as my duty to challenge players in all four major aspects of player development. And, I try to get players to buy into their development by setting those goals. Sometimes, players write them on paper in a journal; sometimes, I've had kids who prefer to create a document on their phones. I prefer that the goals are individual as players are all working on similar but slightly different things. I want players to aspire to perfection in practice, and I want them to know it's important and that it's about a lot more than just "hitting the ball."

Ask any teacher or parent and they'll tell you, kids need routines. Yes, we try to provide a practice experience that keeps players' interested by not doing the same things every day, but there are a few elements to the daily routine that I feel are critical. Here's a typical practice day at EHS:

2:10-2:25-Snack and announcements in the room. Yes, we are very fortunate to have a building in which we can meet each day to have a little food before practice, but even if we didn't have our meeting place, I would find a spot to have an approximate 200 calorie snack before we go on the court. This is an important time for kids to decompress after the rigors of their academic day, get some fuel, and listen to any messages (especially logistical ones) that I need to convey. The snack isn't just a matter of eating for fun; many of the kids eat lunch at 10:30; we practice until 5. All the science says that that's too long for a teenage athlete to go without food, especially ones who are engaging in high-performance training for sports. If you don't want your athletes to bonk (technical term for running out of food-based energy), then help them get what they need. I collect \$20 from each player, which I give to a parent volunteer who organizes keeping the cabinets filled with healthy pre-practice snacks. A few details include: we emphasize that this is a snack, not a meal; cleanliness is important (now more than ever), so players wash their hands, and our "snack parent" looks for individual items like granola bars or pieces of fruit, as opposed to a giant bag of pretzels into which each player puts his/her hands; I pick a couple of new players to be in charge of cleanup each day and one veteran to supervise the cleanup, and, yes, there's a price to be paid (team running) for leaving a mess on the table or the floor; if your family isn't in a position to make the \$20 snack donation, it's ok, you still get to partake; I pay the \$20 just like everyone else; I always ask for food allergy concerns and communicate that to the snack parent, and I've even kept Epi-pens in the room if a parent asked me to. Any money left over, goes toward the banquet; if we run out, then sometimes I'll collect a bit more from the kids.

2:30, on the court beginning the active warm-up. Our active warm-up is nothing extraordinary, but I would encourage you to not do any static stretching, which we save for the end of practice, and we always

do a brief thera-band routine. (By the way, the thera-bands can be purchased through your athletic trainer; it's just surgical tubing about 3-4' long). We all know the benefits of this type of strength training, but the key is to do it consistently. Many of you know that I direct a pro tennis tournament at EHS. During this event, many of the world's

top male players spend several days training and competing on our courts. Watching them for the last nine years I can promise you that very few do not do something similar each and every day. After the active warm-up and thera-band exercises, then I have the players set their goals. I ask them to spread out and be quiet during this time, and I emphasize that from this point on, their mind should be on their game/goals.

The warm-up phase is nearly complete as players spread out and begin hitting. Like most of you, I want them to start close and gradually work their way back to the baseline. I also want to make sure they hit plenty of volleys, serves and overheads, which I believe to be the least practiced shot in tennis. During this time, I am keenly interested in 4 body parts: eyes, hands, feet, and mouth. I think we all know how important the first three are in tennis, but if the mouth is engaged, then it can be massive distraction to everyone. I'm not asking for monastic silence, but constant yammering will be corrected. Again, just because we are out there, doesn't mean we are out there!

At about 2:50/3:00, I know that I've got about two hours left to work on the things that I think will be most beneficial. Typically, I will divide the practice into thirds: stroke production, shot sequence, and long games. At different points in the season, the practices are never exactly spent with 1/3 equally between the three sections, but it's a good place to start.

Phase I: Stroke Production: every good tennis player knows that you need to hit a lot of balls. During this first third, players are grinding out hundreds of groundies, volleys, serves and overheads. I could

write all day about ways to keep players from standing around, but let it suffice to say that there is no idleness during this phase. Players are hitting constantly, and they almost always have a very specific

objective. For example players are often asked to hit “5 x 10 every direction and then switch sides.” That means that two players have to hit five sets of ten in a row cross-court and down the line, each direction. That’s 20 sets, and then they have to switch ends and do it again. You can switch those numbers around depending on your team,

but you get the point. Then, I’ll give something similar for volleys and overheads. Again, I could write forever about the kind of specific drills to do here, but the bottom line is I need them to have extensive stroke repetition of all the shots—not just groundies. Often times, I’ll have 6 or so players doing these types of cooperative drills, while I rotate the players for some individual work with me. It’s that high-level of organization that I find thrilling!

Phase II: Point simulation: in Phase I, players were not trying to “win” points. In Phase II, they are. In this second third of the practice, I’m looking for players to use the strokes we just pounded for about 40 minutes into some type of sequence. Games are great at this point, but I want them to be short games, and, as always, I have very goals in mind. I tend to put players in situations in which they are not comfortable. Single-serve points, approach shot games, passing shot games, are just a few of the many areas of emphasis. I want the kids to play many different opponents, and I don’t want them standing around; games with elaborate rules that take minutes of explaining are a waste of time. Again, I could list about 25 options that I use during this phase, but you get the point.

Phase III: Long games. For the last third of practice, I want players playing longer games—games to 21, sets, that sort of thing. Tennis is played against one opponent or team, and players have to figure out a formula for success. At this point, I want to simulate that type of competition. I need players to go through the mental process of beginning, developing, and ending a set or a match. If the practice just includes the two aforementioned phases, then I think leaving out this last phase is really doing a disservice to the players. They have to

learn to play set-length competition, and this is the time to get it. Often times, I’ll give the set a theme or tweak the rules, like, single-serve sets, unforced errors in the net count for two points, etc. Also, I

like to make sure that long games include plenty of doubles. Finally, I don’t mind giving players a 5-minute break before this last third. Why? Because in tennis players often take breaks away from the court and then come back to compete. Learning to mentally manage that break is essential, so I don’t mind it when players go to the bathroom or refill their water jug at this point.

While I keep these thirds in mind in my practice planning, depending on where we are in the season, I’ll adjust them accordingly. For example, early in the season, we will emphasize the first third, whereas later, the last third becomes more critical during training.

Side note: I believe strongly in challenge matches (I could write an entire article about their value and how I organize those matches), and sometimes we are playing challenge matches on all 8 courts, but often, I’ll put challenge matches on two courts, while I run through the practice with the remaining varsity kids who aren’t playing a challenge match on the other two courts that I have for varsity practice. Think of it like this, if I’m practicing with 12 varsity kids on 4 courts, and then if I’ve got a singles and a doubles challenge match going, on, then I’m working through the above three phases on two courts with just six kids; the next day, I flip-flop the kids. Meanwhile, on the other 4 courts, my assistant coach is doing something similar with the JV kids. Divide and conquer.

In closing, this isn’t meant to be a comprehensive list of everything you need to know to run a successful high school practice, and clearly, the greatest variables are your number of kids, coaches and courts, but I think if you’ll consider organizing your practices into thirds, developing a routine with which your players become familiar and comfortable, and working as hard as you can toward perfection, your players will improve, and that’s what makes practice count.

## IHSTCA CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or comments about anything that I've said here, or maybe you have some tips for me, please email me ([dlipe@ecusd7.org](mailto:dlipe@ecusd7.org)).

### 2020 IHSTCA AWARDS DEADLINES



**Pitchford Sportsmanship Award** **Monday, October 19**  
<http://www.ihstca.org/assets/uploads/documents/IHSTCA%20Sportsmanship%20nomination%20form.pdf>

Submit to Matt Gross: [mgross@ottawahigh.com](mailto:mgross@ottawahigh.com)



Sean Masoncup, President [sean.masoncup@d303.org](mailto:sean.masoncup@d303.org)  
Workshop, Chair  
Hall of Fame, Chair

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Newsletter, Chair  
Coach of the Year, Chair  
Workshop Registration

Patti Shaw, Treasurer [pshaw-5@hotmail.com](mailto:pshaw-5@hotmail.com)  
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State Format, Chair  
All State Girls, Chair



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To submit articles/items, send to:  
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