

# mini squash

## Coaches Handbook

Ages 9 - 10 Years

Practice Sessions



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## **Mini Squash**

There are six progressive practice sessions for players ages 9-10. The goal of these practices is to help players enjoy the experience of learning to play the game of squash. By the age of 9 - 10, players have the physical ability to play the game well and achieve success, especially on a full size squash court with a blue ball.

These practices develop the skills needed to participate in the different playing situations in squash. Each practice session introduces new skills or develops skills learned in previous sessions. Some players will be new to squash and others will already have played on a modified court. The practices are progressive.

- **Playing Situation 1: Both players in the backcourt.** This situation requires the player to be able to hit and control the ball consistently (the number of shots hit in sequence) and accurately (to a specific place in the backcourt) on both the forehand and backhand sides. The ability to do this will enable the players to develop good tactics to use in competition.
- **Playing Situation 2: Serving.** By this age the players should be able to serve to both sides of the court (forehand and backhand) to serve overhand, lob, and drive to both sides of the court equally well. They have the physical ability to hit the ball with some pace to the receiver.
- **Playing Situation 3: Returning the serve.** Players need good and reliable forehands and backhands and the ability to judge the incoming ball quickly in order to hit the return. The skills the player needs to learn and develop for this situation are the drive and volley.
- **Playing Situation 4: Front Court Play.** The player can then play a lob shot with the player in the front of the court and a drop shot with the opponent in the back of the court.

Each practice will develop the technical skills that will enable the player to develop the tactics for these different situations. Learning how, why and when to play the different shots and where to be on the court is important. Being able to do so means that young players can gain confidence and have fun learning and competing

### Each Session is Structured as Follows

#### **COACHING TIPS**

1. The objective of the practice.
2. A warm-up activity that helps develop the athletic skills of the age group.
3. A review of what was learned in the previous session.
4. A new skill and a series of practices to develop that skill in a playing situation.
5. A team game that reinforces the skills and tactics of the playing situation.
6. A cool down activity.
7. A homework assignment,

## 6 Practice Overviews

This guide outlines the six practice sessions. It serves as a reference of what is covered in depth during each practice.

### Practice 1 Forehands and backhands with control

Warm-up	Coordination, Agility, Balance
New Skill	Forehands and backhands with control
Team Game	1 Racquet Team Rally
Homework	Around the Back

### Practice 2 Serving

Warm-up	Run and catch, Coordination and rhythm, Throwing
New Skill	Serve
Team Game	Team serving
Homework	Around the World

### Practice 3 Returning the serve

Warm-up	Cone Turn, Reaction speed
New Skill	Returning the serve
Team Game	Team Returns
Homework	Fast Reactions

### Practice 4 Front Court Play

Warm-up	Around the Circle
New Skill	Front court play
Team Game	Game Over
Homework	Target Choice

## Practice 5 Moving the Opponent Around the Court

Warm-up	Steps and Arms, Speed
New Skill	Moving the opponent around the court
Team Game	Short and Deep
Homework	Spinning Balls

## Practice 6 Learning the basic patterns at serve, return and rally

Warm-up	Follow my Leader, Coordination and rythm Reaction speed
New Skill	Learning the basic patterns of serve, return and rally
Team Game	Win in 5
Homework	Target Ball

# Mini Squash: practice 1

## Forehands and Backhands with Control

Court Size: Full size

Session Length: 60 minutes

### Objective

To learn to hit forehands and backhands with control.

### Warm-up

#### COORDINATION

**Bounces and Clap.** Each player with a ball. Throw the ball in the air and clap at least once, preferably two or three times, before catching the ball with one hand before it hits the ground. Try to increase the number of claps between the throw and the catch. Get players to try turning around and clapping before catching the ball.

#### AGILITY

**Cone Sprint.** Players in teams of four. Place three cones 6 feet apart in a straight line on the court and about 3 feet away from the front wall. Players start from the back wall and, taking turns, sprint to the last cone, move around it quickly with small steps, side-step to the next cone and repeat the small steps around that cone. The player must face the front wall the whole time. When players have moved around all three cones, they return to the back wall and the next player starts.

#### BALANCE

**Stretch Balance.** Two players stand about 6 feet apart. One throws a ball underhand, alternately wide, low or high so partner has to stretch to catch it without moving his/her feet or falling over.

## New Skill: Forehands and Backhands with Control

Show players the basic technique for the forehand and backhand drive, including:

- Taking the racket head up and back in preparation for a full backswing.
- How to get to the side of the ball on both the forehand and the backhand as it comes toward them, so they have room to swing the racquet.
- How players should turn their shoulders, making sure they are square to the side wall.

**Forehands and Backhands.** Players practice rallying forehands and backhands in pairs, making sure they try what they have been shown. Check that the grip they use enables them to hit the ball cleanly.

**Developing Control.** The players will need to understand how hard to hit the ball to have it land behind the service box and where on the front wall to hit the ball to have it land deep in the back corner.

### **The Rally.**

Players in pairs, trying to rally to a point behind the service box. Begin by rallying straight ahead down the side wall and then hit crosscourt. Make sure they practice on both the forehand and backhand sides.

### ***Too Hard?***

*Use yellow foam or blue dot ball; or one player has the racquet and the other player feeds the ball to their partner to hit deep to the back court.*

**Rally to a target.** Place a cone or marker about 5 feet from the back wall. Players use the cone or marker as a target to try to get the longest rally with the ball landing close to the target.

### ***Too Hard?***

1. Reduce the number of shots in the rally to two before playing out the point.
2. Use a yellow foam or blue dot ball until the players become competent and confident.

#### **COACHING TIPS**

- Encourage players to use their other arm to turn their shoulders – this will get the racquet back further to produce a longer swing. Make sure the forward swing of the racket is long swing from high to low. A longer swing will help get the ball to the back of the court.
- Emphasize a comfortable grip on the racket for both the forehand and backhand.
- Make sure the ball is hit level or slightly in front of the front foot with the shoulders square to the side wall.
- Remind players to move their feet to get to the ball.

#### **Team Game: One Racket Team Rally**

Teams of two players, numbered one and two, with one racquet per team. Players take turns rallying against another team and giving the racquet to the next player. The team that wins the last ball of each rally wins one point and starts the next rally. Play PAR to 7 and play best of 3 games.

### ***Too Hard?***

*Use a foam mini squash ball or blue dot ball and shorten the court length.*

#### **Cool Down**

Light Jogging and stretching

## Homework

Hand-Eye with Racket: Move around the court while bouncing the ball on the racket face (can include running and change of direction).

# Mini Squash: Practice 2

## Serving

Court Size: Full size

Session Length: 60 minutes

### Objective

To develop the serve with consistency and accuracy.

### Warm-up

**Run and Catch.** Players run across the court, throwing the ball straight up in the air and catching it before it hits the ground. Clap before catching the ball. How many claps while moving and still controlling the throw?

### COORDINATION AND RYTHM

**Side-Step Clap.** Side step while clapping the hands above the head. Work on claps being slower than the feet.

**In Time Together.** Face a partner and side step together, keeping in time with each other. Add clap above head at the same time and keep this in time with partner.

### THROWING

With partner and a large ball, practice throwing two handed chest passes, overhead passes and backward passes to get ball straight to the partner. Make sure both knees are shoulder-width apart and bent, and are then extended to help throw the ball higher.

**Overhand Throw.** Practice underhand, sideways and overhand throwing from the service box , aiming over the service line on the front wall. Make sure players stay sideways to the line and keep their hips and feet sideways until the ball is released.

## Review: Forehands and Backhands with Control

Players rally for four shots cooperatively and then try to play the point out competitively. The player who wins the rally scores a point.

## New Skill: First Serve

- Show the Underhand, overhand and side serve several times and emphasize that it is like the side, underhand and overhand throw.
- Show players the feet, racquet and ball positions to start the serve.

Players practice and develop the basic shape of the serve (before and only if necessary), breaking it down into simple steps.

- As players develop or improve the action, make sure they serve from the left and right service box each time and keep their balance.
- Remind players to serve diagonally to a point high and approximately half way across the front wall to allow the ball to strike the side wall near the back of the court.

**Players practice serving to both courts (Forehand and Backhand).** Players practice first for consistency (number of serves above the service line and into the correct side of the court) and then for accuracy (hitting the ball to a specific place in the court). Place a large target in each corner of the opposite court. Get players to serve at the targets, explaining to them that the position of the targets is where they should try to aim the serve.

### **Too easy or too hard?**

*The size of the targets can be increased or decreased depending on the ability of the players.*

## COACHING TIPS

- At this age, players are able to turn their hips and shoulders so the racquet can go back a little farther
- Explain that a consistent serve is the first objective, but that after that the serve needs to be hit to different places to make it more difficult for the receiver to return the serve.
- Show players how to be ready for the return of serve as they recover from the serve.

## Team game: Team Serving

**Players in teams of four:** Each player has three serves to a target (large targets in different parts of service area). Other players on the team count how many balls land in target area. Add scores together for the team. The team with the highest score in a certain time wins.

### ***Too Easy?***

1. *Reduce size of targets.*

## Cool Down

Light jogging and stretches

## Homework

**Around the World:** Standing still and not moving your feet, bounce the ball so that you move it right around your body and back to the front without losing it. Make sure you can go around both ways.

# Mini Squash: Practice 3

## Returning the Serve

Court Size: Full size

Session Length: 60 minutes

### Objective

To learn to receive and return the serve

### Warm-up

**Cone Turn:** Players in pairs with eight cones per pair. Cones are spaced out on the court. One player turns them all over and then the partner turns them all back. Set the time for the players to do this as fast as they can.

### REACTION SPEED

**Chase:** In pairs, one player turns his/her back to her partner and stands with legs shoulder width apart. The partner then rolls a ball through the partner's legs and the player has to run and stop the ball as soon as possible. (The ball should be rolled so the player has to run to stop

**Ball Drop:** In pairs facing each other, one player with arms extended at shoulder height and with a tennis ball in each hand. The player drops one of the balls at random. The other player has to catch the dropped ball after one bounce.

### Review: Serves

Stress consistency and then accuracy, Players practice hard and fast serves, and then lob serves, slower and higher.

## Review: Serves

**Ready position and court position:** Show players where to stand to return the serve, and show the ready position – racquet head up and in front, wrist cocked, with knees bent.

Explain to players how to track the serve to judge where the ball will land in the court. Show them:

- How to move quickly if the serve comes straight at them.
- How to take a shorter swing if the serve comes fast and reduces the time to move.
- Where to return the ball down the wall to make it harder for the server.

**Serve and Return:** Players in two's server alternating with a receiver so the receiver gets plenty of practice. Change around at regular intervals or after a number of serves. Receivers practice:

- Position of feet and position of body.
- Moving the feet when receiving the serve.
- Returning on both sides of the court and with the forehand and backhand.
- Taking a shorter swing for a faster serve.
- Returning the ball down the wall,

**Score to Four:** Develop the practice from serve and return to playing points of four shots-the serve, return, third and fourth shot to encourage both the server and the receiver to prepare for, and hit, the next shot.

### ***Too hard?***

*Reduce the number of shots to two-the serve and the return, giving points when players successfully complete both shots cooperatively.*

## COACHING TIPS

- The receiver needs to be in a good position on the court and in the ready position with the racquet held in front and the head at about shoulder height.
- Players need to practice returning on both the forehand and backhand sides.
- Players need to develop shorter swings for faster serves.
- Encourage the player to hit the return on the volley, as a good serve that is left to drop will usually result in a poor return.
- Keep the racket head going in the direction you want to hit the ball to go..
- Player needs to recover to the tee early in preparation for the next shot.
- Aim to hit high on the front wall. Stay square to the side wall, and try to return the ball straight.
- Concentrate on consistency of return and then accuracy of return.

### Team Game: Team Returns

In pairs or in fours, players make up a game that makes a good return (high on the front wall, straight and deep) more important than the serve and scores more points. Ensure that the game includes at least the serve and the return.

*The intention of this game is to get the players to think for themselves and to make up a game they will enjoy.*

## Cool Down

Light jogging and stretches

## Homework

With a partner, practice your quick reactions. One of you has two balls and drops one of them for the other person to catch. You can catch it after one bounce, but see if you can catch it before it hits the ground. As you get better, move farther away from your partner.

# Mini Squash: Practice 4

## FRONT COURT PLAY

Court Size: Full size

Session Length: 60 minutes

### Objective

To learn the different skills to play at the front of the court.

### Warm-up

**Around the Circle:** Players in circles of five players or more, linking hands. A sixth player is outside the circle and has to touch a named player in the circle, The five players move the circle around to stop the sixth player being able to reach or touch the named player.

### REACTION SPEED

**Ball Drop:** In pairs facing each other. One player has a tennis ball in each hand with arms extended. The player then drops one of them from shoulder height without warning. The other player has to react quickly and catch the ball after one bounce.

**Wall Catch:** The players face the front wall, one behind the other. The rear player throws the ball against the wall and the front player catches it as soon as possible. For every successful catch move closer to the wall.

**Call My Name:** One player turns his back toward his partner, who throws the ball up in the air and calls the player's name at the same time. The player has to turn around and react to catch the ball after one bounce.

## New Skill: The Lob

### **The Lob: Playing from the Front of the Court**

Show the players how to lob the ball over the head of an opponent when they are under pressure. Explain that the lob is a soft shot therefore it doesn't require a full backswing. The ball is hit quite softly and high on the front wall to land softly in the back of the court. The racquet head finishes above the player's shoulder on the follow through.

### **Lob Practice:**

Players working in pairs. One player is positioned at the front of the court and feeds the ball softly to the front wall for the partner on the tee. Partner at the tee moves forward and tries to hit a lob over the server and into the back corner of the court.

### **COACHING TIPS**

- Player playing lob must get into a low position early to enable them to get under the ball with an open racket face.
- The ball should be struck in front of the leading foot.
- The ball needs to be hit high on the front wall so that it travels over the opponent on the 'T'
- Aim to land the ball on the floor of the back corner of the court.
- Ensure that the head is down, eyes on the ball when playing the shot and the follow through completed before recovering to the 'T'

## Team Game: Game Over

Players in pairs, playing points and games against another pair.. Scoring is normal unless one pair hits a winning lob. Start the game with a serve and a return, and then rally as normal until one pair moves forward on a short ball AND hits a good lob that is not returned. The game is then over. Change pairs. First pair to four games wins the set.

### ***Too Hard?***

- 1. Play with foam or blue dot balls.*
- 2. Players play as individuals, not pairs, against each other. Serve, return and play the point trying to get the ball to the front of the court then lob if possible.*

## Cool Down

**Gentle Jog:** Players jog slowly around the court, gently swinging their arms until they have counted 50. Then they walk for 50.

## Homework

**Target Choice:** Put five targets around the court. Get someone to feed you a ball and tell you which target to aim at. You need to hit the ball with a forehand to land on the target. How many targets can you hit without missing? Can you do it with a backhand?

## New Skill: The Drop

### **The Drop: Playing from the Front of the Court**

Show the players how to drop the ball softly on to the front wall, angled so that it stays close to the side wall. This shot is best played when you have your opponent pushed deep into the back corners of the court. Explain that the lob is a soft shot therefore it doesn't require a full backswing. The ball is hit quite softly (preferably with backspin) on to the front wall to land, close to the side wall and in the front of the court.

### **Drop Practice:**

Players working in pairs. One player is positioned at the front of the court and feeds the ball softly to the front wall for the partner on the tee. Partner at the tee moves forward and tries to hit a drop shot close to the side wall and landing close to the front corner of the court.

### **COACHING TIPS**

- Player playing drop must get into a low position early to enable them to get under the ball with an open racket face.
- The ball should be struck in front of the leading foot.
- The ball needs to be hit low on the front wall preferably with backspin so that it dies early in the front of the court.
- Aim to angle the shot so that the ball stays close to the side wall.
- Use a shortened backswing, bring the racket head down and forward using a slicing action

## Team Game: Game Over

Players in pairs, playing points and games against another pair. Scoring is normal unless one pair hits a winning drop. Start the game with a serve and a return, and then rally as normal until one pair moves forward on a short ball and plays a good drop that is not returned. The game is then over. Change pairs. First pair to four games wins the set.

### ***Too Hard?***

- 1. Play with foam or blue dot balls.*
- 2. Players play as individuals, not pairs, against each other. Serve, return and play the point trying to get the ball to the front of the court then drop if possible.*

## Cool Down

**Gentle Jog:** Players jog slowly around the court, gently swinging their arms until they have counted 50. Then they walk for 50.

## Homework

**Target Choice:** Put five targets around the court. Get someone to feed you a ball and tell you which target to aim at. You need to hit the ball with a forehand to land on the target. How many targets can you hit without missing? Can you do it with a backhand?

# Mini Squash: Practice 5

## Moving the Opponent

Court Size: Full size

Session Length: 60 minutes

### Objective

To learn how to move the opponent around the court.

### Warm-up

**Steps and Arms:** Players practice on their own, moving sideways and forward with side shuffle, carioca steps and split steps, swinging arms forward and backward at same time.

### SPEED

**Around the Cones:** Players in pairs starting from the back court. Place a line of three cones 4 feet back from the front wall in front of each pair of players. Each player, in turn, runs from the backcourt and moves sideways in a figure 8 around the three cones before running back to the baseline. When all of the players in the first line have returned to the backcourt, the second players can start. Repeat five times,

### New Skill: Moving the Opponent Around the Court

- Show the players a rally in which the direction of the ball is changed several times (i.e., the incoming ball goes straight or cross court and/or lands shorter or deeper in the court).
- Discuss with the players how and why you could/should change the direction of the ball, with an emphasis on good court positioning.

- **Short and Wide:** Give the players short and wide playing areas. Players in pairs,. Start with a serve or an underhand drop feed and then play a point. What sort of shots can you play on a wide court? Where is the opponent? How do you beat the opponent? What can you do to get the ball back more often?
- **Long and Thin:** Give the players a long and thin playing area. Players in pairs. Start with a serve or an underarm drop feed and then play a point. What sort of shots can you play on a long, narrow court? Where is the opponent? How do you beat the opponent? What can you do to get the ball back more often?

### ***Too Hard?***

- *1. Play with a foam or blue dot ball.*
- *2. Players throw the ball instead of hitting it, trying to move their opponent around the court.*

**Nothing in the Middle:** Players in pairs, rally to 10, ensuring the ball does not land in the middle of the court (mark out with spots, or throw-down lines). The player loses the point if the ball lands in the middle (i.e., the area marked off by the cones/lines).

### ***Too Hard?***

- 1. Reduce the number of shots to be played.*
- 2. Play with a foam or a blue dot ball.*
- 3. Players throw the ball instead of hitting it, trying to move their opponent around the court.*

**Playing Points:** Players try to win the rally, Play the first to score a game (to four points). Afterward, discuss how most points in the game were won.

## COACHING TIPS

- Help players make decisions based on their position in the court and the position of the opponent. Discuss returning the ball short or long, crosscourt or down the line.
- Remind players to look for the opponent's position and try and hit the ball away from them.

### Team Game: Short and Deep

Players in pairs with racquets and balls. Players design a game that gives more points for a very short ball (drop shot) or a lob (a ball hit over the opponent's head). Encourage the players to try both shots in the game they make up.

### Cool Down

Gentle Jog

### Homework

**Spinning Balls:** With a racquet and a ball, first practice tapping the ball straight up in the air at least 20 times. Then do the same thing, but each time the ball hits the racquet, spin the ball with the strings so that the balls spins as it leaves the racquet.

### New Skill: Learning the basic Patterns of Serve, return and Rally

- Try to get players to think ahead and plan their shots.
- Show players the sequence of serve, return, third and fourth shot so they understand that these shots are linked together.

- The server must think about preparing for the third shot and the receiver must think about the fourth shot.

**Sequence of Shots:** Players practice in pairs to get the sequence and understand the importance of preparing and moving, after the serve, for the third ball and, after the return, for the fourth ball. Make sure players move after each shot to be ready for the next ball.

## Mini Squash: Practice 6

# Learning the Basic Patterns of Serve, Return and Rally

Court Size: Full size

Session Length: 60 minutes

### Objective

To develop basic patterns of play – the serve, return and the rally

### Warm-up

**Follow My Leader:** Players warm up in pairs by circling the court, one following the other who can do any movement-jog forward, backward, skip, hop, etc.-and the player must copy the partner. Change over.

### COORDINATION AN RHYTHM

**Copy This:** Players in pairs and always moving in time with each other. Begin with alternate arm swings. Then butt flicks (place hands behind back, move across the court kicking alternate feet up to touch hands), then sideways steps. Try to give players as many ideas as possible, but ensure that they work in time with each other.

### REACTION SPEED

**React Drop:** Players in twos, one with a tennis ball in each hand and arms outstretched. Player drops one ball at random and partner has to run forward and catch it after one bounce.

## New Skill: Learning the basic Patterns of Serve, Return and Rally

- Try to get players to think ahead and plan their shots.
- Show players the sequence of serve, return, third and fourth shot so they understand that these shots are linked together.
- The server must think about preparing for the third shot and the receiver must think about the fourth shot.

**Sequence of Shots:** Players practice in pairs to get the sequence and understand the importance of preparing and moving, after the serve, for the third ball and, after the return, for the fourth ball. Make sure players move after each shot to be ready for the next ball.

### ***Too Hard?***

1. *Play with a yellow foam or a blue dot ball.*
2. *Play the points by throwing the ball so players get used to moving.*

**Play it out:** Play points, changing the server and the receiver. Ask players why they played a shot as they did. Rally the first four shots and then play out the point.

### **COACHING TIPS**

- Ensure that players understand the basic principle of preparing and moving for the next shot.
- Show players several different points so they understand the basic principles of shot sequences.

## Team Game: Win in 5

Players in teams of two against another team of two players. Decide which team serves first. Players are numbered one through two and must play one shot in that order. If the rally finishes before both players have played a shot, then the game re-starts from the next player up. The object is to play the first four shots of the rally (players may not hit a winner on the first four shots, which includes the serve as the first shot) and then win the point on the fifth shot. If team does that, then they score five points. If the rally continues after the fifth shot, then the team that wins it only scores one point. The team that wins the point serves the next point. The first team to score 25 points is the winner.

### ***Too Hard?***

- 1. Reduce the rally to three shots-serve, return and third shot.*
- 2. Award five points to the team that wins the rally.*

### ***Too easy?***

*One player must play a rally of four shots and then win the rally on the fifth shot against a player from the opposite team.*

## Cool Down

Gentle jogging and stretches

## Homework

**Target Ball:** Practice throwing tennis ball overhand at targets that are different distances away. How far can you throw? How close can you get to the target?