

## **Best Practices: Unified Doubles League with JTT**

In the Unified Doubles League, athletes with disabilities are paired with players from Junior Team Tennis (JTT), the nation's largest youth tennis league serving boys and girls ages 8 to 18. The aim is to promote fitness, foster friendships, build a sense of community, and embrace inclusivity for individuals with disabilities. Additionally, the experienced junior players in this program are ensured a transformative tennis experience.

Guidelines for the league are outlined below as one example of how the pilot programs were run. The program was free for participants from both organizations, and junior players received community service hours for their time.

### **League Format:**

A team match that consists of unified doubles pairings, with each pair comprising 1 adaptive player and 1 JTT player. Teams will play at least 3 matches per event. There will be at least 3 dates per season.

### **Match Format:**

- Matches are a modified format of three 20 – 25 minute timed matches each week.
- A set is 6 games with a tie-break played at 5-all, and the first team to reach 7 points wins by a margin of 1 point. No-ad scoring is used.
- The unified partner receives from the unified partner, and the adaptive athlete receives from another adaptive athlete.
- After the designated time, the winners move up a court, and the consolation players move down a court. If the match is not concluded, whichever team is ahead at the end of the time is the winner.
- Teams should check in with captain/volunteers and turn in scorecards to captains at the end of the team match.

## **JTT Coordinator Perspective Planning**

1. Meet with the Adaptive Program Coordinator to determine how long the program will run. At least 3 matches, lasting 1 ½ hours each, is preferred. Determine how many players (8-12 is suggested), from each organization, are expected to commit to participating.

2. Decide which program will provide the tennis balls for the matches.
3. Make general plans for the Season Ending Celebration (who will be responsible for food, prizes, etc.).
4. Recruit players to participate: intermediate and advanced level, aged 15 and older, preferred.
5. Manage the JTT registration and forms. Medical/Media waivers (examples attached) should be included in the registration process.
6. Secure courts for the season, preferably the same day, time and location for the duration of the program.
7. Communicate with JTT players in case of weather cancellations. Weekly email reminders are helpful to remind players of the schedule, and to confirm attendance.
8. Meet with the JTT players before the first match to review responsibilities and expectations. Tips on being a Unified Doubles Partner are attached. A video demonstration can be found at (link).

The JTT Coordinator or Captain is expected to attend each match.

**Match Responsibilities:**

1. A group warm-up/stretch before the match encourages community. Having the adaptive athletes lead this is beneficial.
2. Captain/Volunteers should put partners and opponents together initially based on skill level.
3. Captain/Volunteers are on-site to help with the organization and flow of matches.
4. Captain/Volunteers remain on-site for the duration of the matches.
5. Teams check in with Captain/Volunteers at the end of the team match and turn in scorecards.
6. The JTT Coordinator and Adaptive Program Coordinator determine the courts for the next match.

Helpful Tips for JTT Players - Being a Unified Partner "Playing for a Cause":

- JTT players serve as unified partners for adaptive players.
- The main goal is to provide a fun and safe environment for all players.
- Unified partners should bring energy and make the match enjoyable, with lots of encouraging words and gestures, such as high fives.
- The focus is on the adaptive players, and unified partners may coach them if needed, such as helping them call out the score when serving or directing them on where to stand on the court.
- Unified partners avoid playing out balls and try not to hit winners to keep the match fun. Please follow the rules of tennis.
- They should gauge the level of their partner and opponent, playing to their level, to ensure everyone has success.
- Unified partners are encouraged to set a good example and make the experience rewarding for adaptive players.

### **End-of-Season Celebration**

1. All players participate.
2. Depending on the number of participants, divide into groups and play a round-robin tournament.
3. Matches are played in short sets (first to 4 games, tiebreaker at 3-all, and first to 7 points wins by 1).
4. Snacks or a meal are provided.
5. An end-of-season celebration commemorates the participants' achievements and fosters a strong sense of community. This celebration will provide opportunities for social interactions, allowing participants to bond, share experiences, and form lasting friendships.

### **Post Season**

Ask participants to fill out a player survey (sample attached). Review the results with the Adaptive Coordinator, and make changes for the next season based on the results.

## **Adaptive Program Coordinator Perspective**

### **Planning**

1. Meet with the JTT Program Coordinator to determine how long the program will run. At least 3 matches, lasting 1 ½ hours each, is preferred. Determine how many players (8-12 is suggested), from each organization, are expected to commit to participating.

2. Decide which program will provide the tennis balls for the matches.
3. Make general plans for the Season Ending Celebration (who will be responsible for food, prizes, etc.).
4. Recruit players to participate: intermediate and advanced level, are preferred. For best results, invite players that will succeed to attend.
5. Manage the Adaptive registration and forms. Medical/Media waivers (examples attached) should be included in the registration process.
6. The JTT Coordinator will secure courts for the season, preferably the same day, time and location for the duration of the program, and notify the Adaptive Coordinator with that information.
7. Communicate with Adaptive players in case of weather cancellations. Weekly email reminders are helpful to remind players of the schedule, and to confirm attendance.
8. Meet with the Adaptive players before the first match to review responsibilities and expectations.
9. Coordinate volunteers for each match, ensuring success for the program.
10. If there are Adaptive athletes over the age of 21 participating in this program, a Safe Play Exemption can be obtained. Exemption Process: Please email [safeplay@usta.com](mailto:safeplay@usta.com) with the subject line "Training Exemption" and provide in the email the name of the program, the location of the program, and the list of names of adults who do not have the cognitive ability to complete the SafeSport training. The list will be provided to the U.S. Center for SafeSport for tracking.

The Adaptive Coordinator or Coach is expected to attend each match.

### **Match Responsibilities**

1. A group warm-up/stretch before the match encourages community. Having the adaptive athletes lead this is beneficial.
2. Captain/Volunteers should put partners and opponents together initially based on skill level.

3. Captain/Volunteers are on-site to help with the organization and flow of matches.
4. Captain/Volunteers remain on-site for the duration of the matches.
5. Teams check in with Captain/Volunteers at the end of the team match and turn in scorecards.
6. The Adaptive Program Coordinator JTT Coordinator and determine the courts for the next match.

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### **Post Season**

Ask participants to fill out a player survey (sample attached). Review the results with the JTT Coordinator, and make changes for the next season based on the results.

Example of a Medical/Media Release:

Release & Medical Release for Tournaments, Clinics, & Events

(Name of organization) Release:

Acceptance of my entry in these events is without assumption or responsibility of any kind by \_\_\_\_\_, its associates or committee, or the management of any event in which I may be entered or may participate. In

consideration of the acceptance of my entry, I do hereby, for and on behalf of myself, my heirs, and my legal representatives, release and forever discharge \_\_\_\_\_, its officers, committees, and representatives, and their successors and assigns, of and from any and all claims and damages, losses, or injuries which may be suffered or sustained by me in connection with my activities during the period for which such permission is granted and any period traveling to and from the events described, and all claims are hereby waived and released, and I covenant not to sue therefore.

Medical Release: I hereby consent to the rendering of emergency first aid and other medical procedures, which at the time of injury or illness seems reasonably advisable. I further understand that I will be responsible for the payment of any such medical procedures. In consideration of the acceptance of my entry, I hereby agree to abide by all applicable rules and regulations, and codes of \_\_\_\_\_ for this \_\_\_\_\_ event and hereby consent to be tested for drugs pursuant to the provisions thereof.

#### MEDIA RELEASE FORM

In consideration for my attendance at the \_\_\_\_\_, I hereby irrevocably grant to the \_\_\_\_\_, their affiliates, subsidiaries, successors, assigns, and licensees the worldwide right to use, separately or together with others, my name, picture likeness, and/or biographical materials, including the official \_\_\_\_\_ website, for the promotion of their programs/activities. I hereby release and agree to hold harmless the \_\_\_\_\_ from any and all claims of any kind which I, my heirs, executors, and assigns may have on account of participating in the above-mentioned \_\_\_\_\_ Event and the use of any photographs, videos, or any other media generated as a result of my participation in the program.

I waive and release any and all rights and claims against the \_\_\_\_\_ and/or their employees for any injury or loss suffered while taking part in this program.

These were the questions in the survey.

2. Would your athlete like to participate in Unified Doubles again?
3. What time of year/season/months (can be more than one) is the best time for your family to participate in Unified Doubles?
4. If we could change the day and time, what are the best options for your family (please give more than one)?
5. In terms of format (welcome, stretching, rotating play time), what would you like to see added/taken away or done differently?
6. Please share what your athlete enjoyed most about Unified Doubles and anything else you would like us to know.

And lastly, if you could write a sentence or have a story about Unified Doubles to encourage others, what would it be?

Thanks everyone! We appreciate you!  
See you on the court soon!