

YOUR FIRST TOURNAMENT

Hello, and welcome to your first tennis tournament experience. Tennis is a great sport and tournament play is one of the greatest aspects of our game. This brief guide will help you understand the process of playing your first tennis tournament.

Registering for the Tournament:

<http://tennislink.usta.com/tournaments/Schedule/Search.aspx>

This is the USTA's searchable tournament database. Here, you can look up tournaments by region and state, as well as tournament dates. Search for your particular tournament at this website to locate event and registration information. Most tournaments will be accessible from TennisLink. Here you will find how to register, tournament format and fees, playing locations and more. You can always contact the Tournament Director if you have questions.

Remember that you must be a USTA member to play in USTA sanctioned tournaments. If you do not have a USTA membership, this link will take you to the USTA's home page where you can look at the membership options and get signed up.

<http://www.usta.com/Membership/Default.aspx>

Finally, be sure that you can commit to the time required to play a tournament. Most tournaments will run for an entire weekend. You may play a match on Friday night, two more on Saturday (one in the morning and one in the afternoon), then another one or two matches on Sunday. This is not always the case, but you need to be prepared to play for the entire weekend. If you cannot commit to the whole tournament, do not sign up. Remember that there is another player expecting you to be there. If you don't show up for a match, someone else loses out.

Before Your First Match:

You need to know when to check in, and when you will play your first match. You can get this information through Tennislink. Do not call the Tournament Director for start times. The Tournament Director is very busy getting the tournament organized, preparing the draws and scheduling the matches. Each tournament has a Tournament ID#. Use this to access the tournament through Tennislink to get all of the information you need about tournament check-in and match start times.

Make sure that you have all of the proper equipment for your matches. It is a good idea to get a tennis bag to keep all of your gear in. It doesn't have to be fancy, but it helps to keep all of your belongings together. You should pack this bag, and double check it, the night before the tournament. If you are a junior player, this is your responsibility, not your mother or father's. You are playing the tournament, you are playing the matches and hitting the balls, you need to be responsible for your own equipment.

Some things you should include in your tennis bag:

- Your racquet! (Two if you are playing at higher levels)
- A towel and an extra shirt if the weather is hot.
- Plenty of water or sports drink. Many sites will have water, but some will not. Best to bring your own.
- A healthy snack. Fruit, granola bars, etc. Do not pack your bag with chips and candy.

- Extra grips (at the higher levels)
- A can of tennis balls, just in case you need them.
- Entertainment. There is often a lot of down time between matches. Bring a book, an MP3 player or something similar to keep you occupied between matches.

Remember to eat well and drink lots of water the night before your matches. Do not go out to the courts hungry and dehydrated. Tennis is an active, demanding sport and you need to have your body prepared.

Tournament Day:

You've registered, you have your bag ready, your feeling healthy and excited and ready to go. Here comes your first match and there are a few things you need to do before playing that first point.

Try to get to the tournament site at least 30 to 45 minutes before your scheduled match time. Not only will you have time to get checked in, but you may be able to find an open court on which you can get warmed up.

Get checked in. Go to the tournament desk and make sure the tournament staff knows that you are there. If you do not check in, they will not just assume you are there, and you will likely end up defaulting your match - this means you lose the match without even playing. The tournament desk will be your home during the tournament. This is where you check in, get your match and court assignment, and report your scores.

Stay close to the tournament desk. If you want to go practice, communicate this with the tournament desk and ask them when you should report back for your match.

Your First Match:

Finally, it's time to play. There are a few things to remember, but the most important one is to have fun!

Set realistic goals:

This is your first tournament match. It is very different from taking lessons, playing your friends in clinics, or even playing Team Tennis. Out here, in a tournament, you stand alone once you set foot on the court. So, be realistic about what you want to accomplish. Winning the tournament would be great. Winning a match would be great. But remember, your opponent has a say in those things. Control what you can control.

A few good goals to have:

- Keep your feet moving at all times.
- Go after every single ball.
- Display sportsmanship and integrity.
- Try your best.
- Hit the shots that you like to hit.
- Have a good time.

The match warm up:

You are normally allotted about 10 minutes to get warmed up for your match. This is a time to get your body loose and to get your swing feeling comfortable. This is not a time to hit winners. This is not a time to scout your opponent, though you can certainly get an idea of what shots they like or do not like to hit. Tennis is a game of sportsmanship and etiquette. Use this 10 minute warm up to not only get yourself ready, but to allow your opponent to do the same thing. During the warm up you should hit a few minutes of groundstrokes, a few minutes of volleys and overheads, and a few minutes of serves. Get loose. Hit out on your shots. Make sure that you are comfortable and that all the pre-match jitters are gone before you play the first point. It is not a bad idea to jump rope or do a light jog before the warm up, just to let your body get moving freely.

Playing the match:

- Always know the score before every serve. This helps avoid conflict between opponents.
- Always be fair in calling your opponents shots. If you can't call the ball out, it has to be in.
- Play the ball as your opponent calls it. If you think you hit the ball out, but your opponent doesn't call it, keep playing. If your opponent makes a questionable line call, ask them if they are sure of the call then continue play. If poor line calls continue, stop playing, go to the tournament desk, and ask for a referee.
- Use proper tennis etiquette when playing. You will likely have other matches going on around you. Do not chase balls into other courts until the other players have finished the point. Do not scream and shout. Absolutely no profanity (this will likely get you disqualified from the tournament).
- When the match is done, win or lose, go to the net and shake hands with your opponent. Do not take wins or losses too seriously at this point. Judge your performance on how well you feel like you played, on whether or not you tried your best and on how much fun you had.
- Gather the balls and take them to the tournament desk.
- Report your scores to the tournament desk.

After the match:

Evaluate your performance. Did you have fun? Did you hit shots that you are comfortable with, or did you try to hit shots you haven't learned yet in order to try to get the win? What can you learn from this match that you can use in the next one? What was one thing that you did well that you can continue to use in your next match? What is one thing that you feel you could improve for your next match?

Check with the tournament desk to see when your next match is scheduled. Be sure to show up at least 30 minutes, if not more, prior to this scheduled time. Often times, courts open up early and you can play your matches before the scheduled start time.

When the tournament is done:

- Thank the tournament staff for hosting the tournament. A lot of tournaments are run by teaching professionals who may have some pointers for you.
- Be sure to gather all of your belongings. Check your tennis bag to make sure you have everything.

- A good idea is to keep a match journal. Try to enter some information about each match. What did you do well? What do you want to work on? How do you like to play? These are very valuable things to know when preparing for the next tournament.
- Remember that win or lose, you are a winner for even playing. Tennis is a challenging sport and you have stepped up and played a tournament all by yourself. You should be proud!

Hopefully this will help you get a better idea of what to expect at your first tennis tournament. Remember, you can always ask your local pro or the tournament director about tournament play. You can go to the USTA or your local state tennis organization. There are a lot of resources out there for you to use that will help you enjoy this great game for a lifetime.

Work hard, be a good sport and have fun!