

Jeff's Team Management System

(Nancy Bishof's examples/suggestions contributed substantially to this document. Questions? jjonesdtrt@outlook.com)

- **Team management/communication timing**
 - **2-3 weeks before registration opens:** Initial recruitment query. The earlier, the better – players will hear from lots of captains! (I've accumulated a lot of contact information over the years – you will too, eventually!)
 - **Registration opens:** Create teams in TennisLink, send out team #'s to your recruits, and track registration.
 - **Initial Roster Deadline:** Make sure you have enough players registered to cover a match – that's the minimum for that deadline. (Players can still register right up through the last match of the season.)
 - **Schedule release:** When you're notified that the league schedule is out, query your players (registered or otherwise) as to which matches they can play, **including the State Championship**. Use the results to adjust your team size (see below for more on that).
 - **A week before each match:** Set a roster using the availability query, and send to all players. You'll have a week to adjust the roster if any player's schedule has changed.
 - **A day before each match:** remind the players on the roster.
 - **At the match:** have a printout of your roster, or in a format you can share. Two copies are good, then you and opposing captain can swap instantly.
 - **Within 48 hours after the match:** enter scores, or prompt opposing captain to do so. ("Home" team is officially responsible, but winner is usually in a bigger hurry!)
- **Team issues**
 - **Size:** Many captains shoot for double a match roster size for total team size. So, for 18+/Adult League, this would be $2 \times 8 = 16$.
 - Things that might nudge size higher...
 - State Championship availability
 - Low general availability for players
 - Things that might nudge size lower...
 - High general availability (everyone knows each other, all are enthusiastic about play)
 - Higher expectation for frequency of play.
 - **Player Information:** When you recruit, obtain the following data on players. Tell them you'll honor requests as scheduling will allow.
 - Singles vs. Doubles. (Since 40+ now has only 1 singles court per match, this will require some individual flexibility on the part of 40+ singles players.)
 - Preferred doubles partner. (I also generally ask folks who they'd like to avoid, though most players aren't that particular. If you do, be discrete!)
 - Preferred doubles position (receive serve on deuce vs. ad side)
 - Primary hand (lefties tend to play ad side)
 - I also ask about play style – casual, competitive, aggressive – and try to pair players together with similar styles

- **Management Tools**

- **Goals:** You should track the following things
 - Match availability. If you do this early (see “...timing” above), you won’t be constantly scrambling to fill rosters.
 - Player participation for past matches. You don’t want to end up with one match at the end, and 5 players who’ve only played once.
 - Player preferences. This’ll prevent you from pairing 2 lefties together, or putting someone on singles who hates it.
 - Successful court placement and doubles partnerships.
- **Tools:** I use an Accent database, but I’m guessing that’s not everybody’s cup o’ tea...
 - **Paper:** If you’re a paper person, make sure you bring the data you need to each match. Players will stop you and ask questions – you’ll need answers!
 - **Electronic Spreadsheets:** Many captains use Excel or other spreadsheet to track participation and player preferences.
 - **TennisLink.** Player availability can be entered directly there by the players themselves.
 - **Electronic calendar.** Everyone has an e-calendar on their phone, and the smart folks synch it with wherever else they track appointments. I use mine (MS Exchange/Outlook) to track match rosters and results. (I have a spreadsheet that creates an Exchange import automatically for all matches – let me know if you’d like a copy.)
- **Communications:**
 - **Email:** Anything that requires depth, or depends on groups, should use email. Text does NOT dependably leverage groups on its own (different platforms have different restrictions on group size, etc.)
 - **Text:** This is best used for quick individual communications, such as match reminders.
 - **Text Groups.** Leveraging your phone’s text system for group messages should be used with caution: 1) Not all cell phone platforms support groups equally, it’s easy for messages to get dropped. 2) Players will often bury everyone with short texts or emojis, creating annoying text traffic for the whole group.
 - **GroupMe.** This simple tool allows you to create/manage groups, then leverage text through GroupMe. It’s an app, and also an online system, but your players need install nothing. It’s free, but like all free online tools, expect ads and self-promotions.
 - **Rally78:** This is a new tennis-oriented cell phone app, with some group capabilities. See <https://www.rally78.com/> for details. It’s free, no indication yet how the app will be monetized (probably ads once there’s a sufficient database of users).

- **General Stuff**

- Be timely and transparent in your communication with team members. Nothing is more annoying to your players than finding out about their placement on a match roster the day before a match.

- KNOW THE RULES OF TENNIS. A quick and dirty rules sheet that players can take on the court with them is a good idea:
 - Who makes which calls like double bounces or touching the net?
 - How do you do a tiebreak?
 - What do you do if you can't agree on the score?
 - Line calls? Foot faults? Calling out scores?
- Record scores immediately after a match where you can access them later. Reconstructing match results after the fact is difficult.
- You're short for a match – yes, this happens, and sometimes can't be avoided. (**Make sure all players know the rules about this in advance**, so they aren't surprised!)
 - Notify opposing captain(s) and tennis club as quickly as possible.
 - Don't **demand** reschedules – the schedule is the schedule –**ask** the opposing captain if s/he's willing. If they are, work with them and the original club in finding another date. (Most captains want to get the play in, but you can't demand it.) **Rescheduling is NOT the responsibility of the local league coordinator**, but notify him/her of whole-match reschedules so TennisLink can be updated.
 - If you forfeit a court less than 24 hours before the match, you are obligated to cover all court fees (2 for singles, 4 for doubles). Sometimes clubs will be flexible, but that is at their discretion. Settle up with the club at the match (especially important if your forfeit is from a no-show). Recoup your costs from the player(s) who caused the problem.
- Player participation/Expectations
 - None of us are pros: adult league play is primarily about exercise, fun, and social stuff.
 - Play everyone equally, as much as possible. If you want to play better players more often, **be up front about that**, and be gracious and allow players to switch teams if that's not what they want.
 - Honor players' wishes as much as possible. If someone requests singles, and isn't very good at it, they'll figure it out on their own given the opportunity. Remember the above goals – if players aren't enjoying things, or think they're being ignored, they'll quit.
 - Practice good sportsmanship through your example and encouragement:
 - Discourage angry display.
 - Err in the direction of liberal line calls. (If you're ever unsure, call it in!)
 - Calls should be immediate, and vocal (the opposing players must be able to hear your call).
 - Call point scores loudly!

What follows are examples of emails I used in my communications with players.

Example 1: Newbie email I send to every new member of Team Jones

Good afternoon!

You're getting this email 'cause you're new to me and my USTA teams. I send this information out to all newbies so that they have a sense of how I do business. Please let me know if there are any questions.

How I do stuff

- **Before season starts** (immediately after the schedule is published): you'll get a list of all the season's matches – reply back with any you know you **can't** make. This just provides a start for each roster. I do this so I can head off problem dates with further recruiting. Don't worry if you're unsure, life happens, so adjustments are often required.
- **1 week before each match:** expect to get a roster, with court assignments, **via email**. If you're on it and your schedule has changed, not a problem, let me know then and I'll have a week to replace you.
 - All rosters will have an "alternate" listed. If you're the designated alternate, I just ask you to keep the date open until the day of the match, to cover last-minute problems.
- **24 hours before each match:** you'll get a reminder **via text** (if you, in fact, text), containing time, location, and whether the match is "home" or "away" (we bring new balls to home matches).
- **Day of match:** I ask folks to get there 20 minutes early, so I'm confident everybody's shown up. Besides, we can usually get on the courts early for some practice and warmup.

Play Philosophy

My feeling is that winning is nice, but I'm in this to have fun, get some exercise, and meet tennis players. If the whole "I've gotta win" gets in the way of the other three, I ain't doin' it right. As a result...

- I make sure everybody gets to play the same # of matches, as schedules allow. (I'm an exception – the only advantage to captaining is that I get to play as often as I want!)
- I do my best to pair folks who want to play together, and otherwise match playing styles. (Of course, schedules impact that, so some flexibility is helpful.)
- I'm not one who puts ringers on 3rd court, and puts sacrificial lambs on 1st. Not my style. So the better players can expect to be 1st or 2nd court.
- I most certainly expect y'all to be nice to each other, and nice to your opponents. Drama is bad, drama is not our friend. ;-)

Communication:

There's nothing more frustrating than communication rattling down a rat hole and disappearing. I'm retired, so I have time to hound people, but it's not fun. Take a moment to make sure I'm in your "contacts" (my cell phone # is 859-608-8686), and watch for notices which require a timely response. I promise not to abuse communications channels with a lot of unnecessary chatter.

If anything isn't going as expected, please let me know. I'll do my best to make this as comfortable and fun as possible for everybody.

Thanks again for playing!

Jeff

Example 2: I secure and track the following information on my players.

Greetings!

Here's my standard list of questions for new players.

- Cell #, and do you text?
- Do you prefer singles, doubles, or do you care?
- When playing doubles, do you prefer receiving serve on deuce or ad side, or do you care?
- When playing doubles, is there anyone you'd prefer to be partnered with? Alternatively, is there anyone you'd like to avoid? (It'll be our little secret.) See list below for our team at this moment *[I include the current roster]*. Oh, and be sure that if the answer to this is "...anyone **but** [insert name here]..." that you don't "reply all." Awkward... ;-) I try to honor requests as much as possible, but most of my guys are pretty flexible.

Thanks.

Jeff

Example 3: Roster notification. As per my "management system," this email goes out one week in advance of all matches. I've left some of my "cheerleading/scouting" stuff in as an example. Names have been removed...

Good evening:

Bam! Still in first place, now with 2 matches under the belt...and a little help from a forfeit from our last opposing captain. *[player name]* nailed singles to seal the match.

Below please find the roster for the Fall 18+/4.0 match against *[Team name]* **Saturday, Oct. 20, 5:00 PM, LTC**. Let me know if you're on this list but your plans have changed, and you can no longer play. Otherwise, no response is required now. Will send a reminder via text 24 hours out. This is a "home" match (we supply balls).

[Team name] will be strong, but they haven't been seriously tested yet. *[2nd team name]* got a court off of them, a team that's a little closer to us in player ratings, so we should be competitive. Let's step up!

- Singles: *[player name]*
- 1st Doubles: *[player name]/ [player name]*
- 2nd Doubles: *[player name]/ [player name]*
- Alternate: *[player name]*

Jeff

Example 4: 24 hour reminder. As per my "management system," this goes out as a text the day before a match. I generally don't do "groups" for this (each gets a copy/paste), to avoid a lot of unnecessary text traffic.

A reminder, you're scheduled for a USTA 18+/4.0 match tomorrow, Saturday, 5:00 PM, LTC. Arrive 4:40. "Home" match, (bring balls).