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# Burlington County Times

## A whole new racquet

**By: KRISTEN COPPOCK**  
Burlington County Times

TEXT SIZE

A tennis program aimed at young and inexperienced players is moving children onto the courts, getting them in shape and helping to make the once-stodgy sport trendy again.

In Mount Laurel, The Sports Club of South Jersey began offering the QuickStart program in May, and it's already being deemed a success. "We knew it was going to be a great program right away," said Kevin Patrick, tennis director at the club.

QuickStart is based on a popular European program that has been teaching young people to play tennis for more than a decade, and counts some top professionals among its graduates. It focuses on the fundamentals using equipment appropriate for little hands and tiny bodies. The courts are small, nets are low, the balls don't bounce too high and racquets are lightweight. A three-stage development program allows children ages 4 to 12 to improve on their skills.

On a recent Saturday morning, a few first-time students, including a 3-year-old, were learning how to balance tennis balls on their child-sized racquets. An instructor said they were working on hand-eye coordination. A group of older girls were practicing hitting a ball over the net and striking a target. As part of a game, they received a point for clearing the net and five points for hitting a tube. On a nearby, full-size court, some children were working on more advanced skills.

Prior to the introduction of QuickStart, young players were having a hard time hitting the ball, getting it over the net and covering the court, said Patrick, a Moorestown resident and former player at Moorestown High School. But making it easier for kids to play is paying off for the tennis industry and giving young players the confidence to continue with it.

"If you have success, you tend to enjoy it," Patrick said, who added that a few of the first students in the program already are playing in tournaments. In addition to hitting a ball over a net and returning serves, kids in the QuickStart program are staying physically active throughout the lessons.

A session begins with a group warm-up that includes jumping jacks and stretches. As the children alternate taking turns to work on their skills, they go through footwork drills and are told to "bunny hop" through a ladder that's placed on the court.

"We keep them moving all the time," said Patrick, a former Moorestown Friends coach. "The parents are all fans of the ladder."

Tennis is growing overall as a sport. According to the Tennis Industry Association and the United States Tennis Association, numbers are up across the board, including racquet sales, interest in attending professional matches, televised game viewers and frequency of athletes' play. The sport is now seeing its highest number of players since 1992.

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appropriate for any skill level. Like QuickStart, Cardio Tennis uses alternative balls that make learning the sport easier for beginners.

It is offered at a number of New Jersey tennis facilities, including The Sports Club of South Jersey. Patrick said tennis appeals to people because women and men can play the sport together, and people can participate as an individual

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At The Sports Club of South Jersey, parents of some of the young beginners, observing a practice session from a windowed area above the courts, were already impressed with the program.

Danielle Tran and Travis Nguyen, a couple residing in Hainesport, said they signed up their 8-year-old daughter, Terry Nguyen, for the Quick Start program as an “investment” in her fitness future.

“You can play when you get older,” said Tran, adding that she likes tennis because it’s not a contact sport.

Dave Berkowitz’s 8-year-old son, Benjamin, also is a newcomer to tennis. The Mount Laurel man is a tennis player, and knew about the program that has been used for years in Europe. He said the childfriendly equipment and format are good fits for his son. “He’s having a great time,” Berkowitz said.

For anyone interested in the QuickStart, The Sports Club of South Jersey is offering one free clinic per child. Upon enrollment in the program, new students will receive a free racquet and two private lessons.

For more information about Quick Start, visit [www.quickstarttennis.com](http://www.quickstarttennis.com). To learn more about The Sports Club of South Jersey, call 856-222-1777 go to [www.southjerseytennis.com](http://www.southjerseytennis.com).

**Email: [kcoppock@phillyburbs.com](mailto:kcoppock@phillyburbs.com)**

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