

SSTA

Recommendations & Suggestions for Indoor Court Allocation

MARCH 2021

Court Usage Committee



The Salt Spring Tennis Association (SSTA) is a vibrant organization, filled with, and fueled by, a large and growing community of tennis enthusiasts dedicated to promoting tennis on Salt Spring Island. We are extremely fortunate to have a strong membership, excellent coaching, a thriving junior program and a beautiful indoor facility.

Historically, the SSTA's board, along with the coaches, league coordinators and other program planners, have strived to listen to the needs of the membership and to supply a mix of tennis opportunities designed to meet those needs. Those efforts have made the club extremely successful.

As the SSTA continues to grow, there will naturally be increasing demand for court time from the various stakeholders. The club's overall objective is to strike a balance between ensuring fair and equal access to these stakeholders and maximizing court usage and the long-term financial viability of the club.

The Court Usage Committee was formed to make recommendations regarding court allocations that would continue to meet this objective. These recommendations were guided by formal and informal surveying of the membership, consultations with coaches and league coordinators, historical (pre-pandemic) data on court use trends, as well as data collected from other tennis clubs.

These recommendations are meant to be applied if and when conditions make it possible to return to regular, full and unrestricted operations. The unusual conditions imposed by the current corona virus pandemic require unique and highly-responsive decision making beyond the scope of this report and best left to the board of the time.

General Recommendations

1. The inherent seasonality of our tennis year means there are regular opportunities to evaluate the state of the club and the members' satisfaction with the current court usage policy. Above all else, the committee feels that flexibility, regular review and responsiveness, and preparedness to adjust to changing needs are the keys to an effective court usage policy. The data necessary to evaluate the effectiveness and popularity of any mix of formats (leagues, leisure, block bookings, lessons, drop-ins, social tennis events, etc.) is readily available from the court booking software and the club must be prepared to make adjustments when the data makes it clear they are advisable. For this reason, the club should avoid making any arrangements to automatically carry over bookings of any type from one session to the next.
2. A small group, such as the committee that has been assembled to produce these recommendations, should continue to act to gather the necessary data (from membership, coaches, the league coordinator) and allocate court time accordingly at the beginning of each season. Regular, targeted (through the newsletter, for example) and occasional general surveying of the membership will enable this group to continue to allocate court time in response to membership needs and wishes. It cannot be overemphasized that data from the general membership, and not personal opinion from a few, should be used to guide the court allocation process.

Historically, during the fall and winter seasons, the indoor facility is utilized for a variety of basic functions. The following sections are the recommendations of the committee for managing some of the issues surrounding some of these functions. Some suggestions for expanding the use of the courts in the summer are also included.

1. League Play

a. How many hours per week should be set aside for league play?

Leagues are the most inclusive, club-organized vehicles for tennis play at our disposal. They insure access to any qualified and interested member and provide the club with reliable revenue. The membership rated league play, overall, in the recent survey, as their favourite format for play. If a league is offered and members register to play in it, there seems little reason not to offer it. Therefore it seems prudent to offer as many leagues as are popular, requested and subscribed. The committee recommends the club continue with the policy that we accommodate all eligible members that register for a league, (i.e. if 10 people register for a league, they all get to play; we don't limit it to the first 8 people).

b. How many rated leagues should there be? How many unrated leagues should there be?

Rated leagues are becoming more popular. The club should let "the market decide" on the ratio of rated to unrated leagues. Though ample effort must be made to provide opportunities, especially for new members, to be exposed to lots of other members, it is inevitable that, after a while, players will seek out regular games with players with whom they enjoy playing and are of roughly equal ability.

c. Should new or alternative types of leagues be created?

The club could experiment with adding coaching to a few of the leagues and then to additional leagues if the format is popular. All tennis players can benefit from such a learning opportunity. A coach could attend early in the sessions and supply suggestions and instruction and check back later in the season to help with progress. In the few instances where this has been offered in the past, the results were extremely popular and successful. It would provide opportunities for beginners to make progress and feel successful early in their experience with the club as well as assist more experienced players with opportunities to improve. It would also allow coaches to shift their instructional block to later hours, potentially moving private lessons to after leagues. This would make use of non-prime evening hours and free up prime afternoon hours.

The Team League concept could be expanded to include other rated players as well as mixed ability teams (such as Dave Naphthali's green and blue tournament). These are vehicles that provide both a competitive and social blend.

Scheduled drop-ins (such as Bob Gibson's Saturday morning drop-in) could be expanded to give especially new players an opportunity to see the facility and get to know a few players without having to commit to a regular 12-week league. These could also include coaching.

A new "Member Ambassador" could be appointed who would contact new members and organize introductory tours and social games for these new members. There could be a list of experienced players who are prepared to participate in such games to welcome new players.

We could experiment with the length of some league sessions, offering shorter introductory versions (6 weeks) for beginners who might be hesitant to make a 12 week commitment.

e. Can Club Spark be used to track the ratings of members for assistance when setting up the rated leagues?

The survey data suggests that roughly 2/3 of members are unrated and 60% of these (40% of the entire membership) are interested in becoming rated. Mike Chin has investigated Club Spark and feels it may be possible to record a member's rating by using the "Tags" feature of the program. This label could be made visible on the membership list and would be accessible to admin level users including the league coordinator.

2. Coaching (Private Lessons and the Junior Program)

a. How many hours per week should be allotted for the Junior Program?

Marjorie and Pete recommend 20 h/w and believe such hours are essential for the coach to be able to make a reasonable living. They believe these hours must be in an after school program and cannot be moved outside the 3:30-6:30 pm time slots.

b. How many hours per week should be allotted for private lessons?

Marjorie and Pete recommend 10-15 h/w. These hours could potentially go in non-prime time slots but the coach would likely want time in blocks for private lessons so as not to be constantly travelling back and forth to the courts. However, each coach may have their own desirable schedule and could consider separating their private lessons from the junior program.

c. How late should it be allowed for coaches to cancel booked time without having to pay court fees? Should we arrange it so members pay court fees to the club instead of coaches?

Pete and Marjorie feel that it is a very rare occurrence for people not to show up for their lessons. When they do, they often still pay the coaches for missing their time. The cancellation policy should be the same for the coaches as for the regular members (full refund only for 24 hour's notice). They do not recommend complicating the system by having members who want lessons have to book the court time separately from the coaches. This would involve too much complicated communication and more confusion than the current system.

e. Should we implement something so that coaches are not stuck with the court fee for no shows?

The current coaches are not concerned about this issue at this time.

3. Block Bookings

a. Should we continue to have them?

The recent survey of the membership makes it clear that block bookings are a popular and highly-desired format for the use of the courts by the members, second only to leagues and on a par with leisure play. Accordingly, it makes little sense to remove block bookings from the general types of play offered to the members.

b. If so, how many?

Given the equal popularity of block booking and leisure play, it makes sense to give these two formats equal priority. As such, the number of hours allocated for block bookings should be similar, in total hours, number of blocks and time of day, to the number of hours allocated for leisure play.

c. How would you recommend they be issued? Lottery?

Historically, the club has used a passive approach to block booking, soliciting requests from the membership for the days and times they would like and trying to schedule according to those preferences. The committee recommends a more active approach that would follow these steps:

1. set aside an appropriate number (based on total hours) (e.g. if 12 hours are available, 8 slots of 1.5 hours or 6 slots of 2.0 hours) and distribution (mornings/afternoons, prime time/non-prime time) of block booking slots,
2. solicit requests from any group (minimum 4 players) wishing to be entered in the “block booking lottery”; each group would submit a ranked list of days and times they would be prepared to play,
3. if there are available slots for all applicants, try to accommodate all groups based on their preferences; if there are more applicants than slots, draw a group “from the hat” and give that group first choice of available slots, and so on.

4. Prime and Nonprime Time Hours

a. What would you recommend for prime and non-prime time hours?

Based on input from the general survey as well as data from pre-pandemic periods, the courts are rarely used before 9:00 am and after 8:00 pm (when leagues finish). For these reasons, we believe 9:00 am – 8:00 pm should be considered prime time and outside these hours, non-prime time. Weekend afternoons are also underutilized and could also be considered for incentives in future. As well, special and unique incentives may assist in filling vacant court hours in summer.

b. Should the current rates still apply (prime time \$28.00/h, non-prime \$12.00/h)? This is essentially one of a number of “incentivizing” strategies for encouraging members to make use of shoulder hours as well as expanding use of the indoor courts in the summer season. The data makes it clear that members overwhelmingly prefer to play in the hours between 9:00 am and 8:00 pm. The committee examined a variety of strategies, including reduced rates, for increasing overall court usage. However, based on survey responses, it may remain a perennial challenge to encourage the membership to make use of these hours.

Possible Strategies for Summer

- ✓ Run a slate of leagues in summer for those who want regular, reliable scheduled games.
- ✓ Allow an expanded block bookings schedule just for the summer period.
- ✓ Some matches in all tournaments can be scheduled on the indoor courts to highlight those matches, spotlight the indoor facility and generate some summer revenue. In competitive tournaments, the extra cost can be built into entry fees.

Possible Strategies for Fall/Winter

- ✓ “Early Riser” and “Night Hawk” leagues could be organized by the club and at reduced entry cost.
- ✓ Offer unlimited block bookings in shoulder hours or include shoulder hours in a block booking lottery.
- ✓ The schedule of coaches could be afternoon juniors, stay for league coaching and a private lesson after.
- ✓ Allow coaches “walk-on” privileges to book (for their own play, at no charge) courts still available within 24 hours (an extension of the “24 hour booking rule”).

5. Court Bookings

a. How many bookings per week should each member be allowed to make?

Whatever limits are put in place should be flexible and responsive to feedback from the members and can be adjusted, from time to time, to balance the need for revenue generation with the need for fair access for all members. The current limits can be left in place but if courts are being left vacant, extra bookings can be permitted and when court booking is highly competitive, booking privileges can be clawed back. Effectively communicating the reasons for any changes will be the key to getting membership support.

b. Should we keep it that you can have an extra booking if it is within 24 hours of the booking slot. (We just set this while covid is here and no doubles are allowed)

In the interests of giving members every opportunity to access the courts, as well as to insure courts don't go unused, this system would seem to strike a reasonable balance.

c. Should there be time set as leisure only that can be used for tournaments?

Tournaments should be scheduled for the year, in advance, and could routinely include indoor court booking in leisure time combined with time booked at Portluck Park. This would allow directors to schedule a few indoor matches during all tournaments, to showcase the indoor facility as well as to potentially scramble a complete tournament schedule if weather interfered with outdoor play. Including and/or increasing tournament entry fees would have to be considered to offset indoor court booking costs or the ITF could subsidize the court costs of tournaments. Setting the schedule for tournaments and booking court time routinely and early in the court allocation process should prevent conflicts with leisure bookings in most cases.

Court Allocation Priorities

Current data suggests, under ideal conditions with no restrictions, the order of scheduling priority should be as follows. These are simply guidelines and future conditions and needs, of course, may warrant a reshuffling of these priorities.

1. Junior Coaching

Since the coaching of juniors runs essentially as an after school program, there is limited flexibility in its scheduling. The 20 or so hours must fit around the availability of both the coaches and these young players.

2. Leagues

As stated earlier, survey data indicates this is the most favoured format for most players.

3. Special Events (regular drop-ins, tournaments)

4. Private Coaching

The remaining 15 or so hours of the coach's schedule should be arranged through discussions between the coach and the board or its representative.

5. Block bookings and Leisure Play

Since members rank these formats equally, the remaining available time should be divided equally into these two offerings. Total overall hours as well as the distribution of morning/afternoon and prime time/non-prime time hours should be considered.

