



ACE IN ACTION!

01/2026

INNOVATIVE COACHING, EDUCATION, AND ADVOCACY GROWING
BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED TENNIS ONE COACH AND
COMMUNITY AT A TIME.

WELCOME TO OUR

Monthly Newsletter



ACE coaches in action!

Welcome to the first edition of **ACE IN ACTION!**, the monthly newsletter of the Association for Coaching Excellence (ACE) in Blind Tennis.

Our co-founders, Dana & David, recognized that individuals who are blind or visually impaired face significant barriers to accessing & enjoying the game (read Dana's story on page 2!). Dana and David identified a critical gap: the lack of coaching infrastructure for blind tennis.

Our mission is to fill this gap – empower coaches to be advocates for blind tennis, empathetic to players' needs, and equipped with the tools to teach the sport effectively. As we fulfill this mission, we're building an incredible community along the way.

We hope this newsletter serves as a welcoming space to connect our ever-growing community of coaches, players, parents, and advocates around our shared mission and direction.

Dana Costa and David Dilettuso

Co-Founders, Association for Coaching Excellence (ACE) in Blind Tennis



Hands-on instruction using sound-based tennis balls

In this newsletter you will find:

Inspiring stories, past events, and upcoming workshops, & more. Keep Reading!



What is blind tennis?

Blind tennis is an adaptive iteration of tennis with rules that modify equipment, court size, and play to match an athlete's level of vision.

Players are **classified into categories** (B1 through B4) based on visual acuity and peripheral vision, with B1 athletes having little to no functional vision and B4 athletes having the highest usable vision.

An **audible tennis ball**, typically foam or low-compression with internal sound source, allows players to track the ball by hearing rather than sight.

Tactile lines help players identify boundaries of the tennis court.

Depending on classification, players are **permitted one to three bounces** before returning the ball, and **court dimensions may be modified** to support spatial mobility.

Dana's Story

Dana Costa's journey into blind and visually impaired (BVI) tennis began in 2018, not through a strategic plan, but through her daughter, Domiana. When Domiana participated in a blind hockey event, Dana and her husband, both with strong tennis backgrounds, were struck by a simple question: Why doesn't this exist in tennis?

As Dana began researching, she discovered that blind tennis was being played all over the world. What was missing wasn't interest or ability—it was structure, education, and opportunity in the United States. With mentorship from international BVI tennis leader Simon McFarland, Dana piloted the first BVI tennis clinic in Pittsburgh. What started as a single clinic quickly revealed a much larger need: uniform programming, educated coaches, and clear pathways for players to grow—from their first experience on court to competitive play.

Domiana's story is the heart of Dana's work. Diagnosed at just six weeks old with Congenital Fibrosis of the Extraocular Muscles (CFEOM), a rare condition that limits visual fields and eye movement, Dana was told her daughter would never play sports. But knowing Domiana, Dana refused to let that define her. Instead, she focused on understanding how Domiana "sees the world" – a question Dana now asks every new blind tennis player who steps onto the court.

By learning how Domiana processes space, sound, movement, and trust, Dana was able to help design strategies that led to success not only in tennis, but across multiple sports. Domiana learned how to self-advocate, problem-solve, and believe in her own athleticism – skills that extend far beyond the court. She went from being told "you can't" to proving, time and again, that she could.

Today, Dana's work in blind tennis is driven by Domiana and the many athletes whose stories mirror her own. Drawing from her background in education, Dana focuses on building sustainable programs, developing qualified instructors, and creating meaningful pathways from grassroots participation to competitive opportunities. Blind tennis has become more than a sport – it is a vehicle for independence, confidence, and possibility. It is living proof that when athletes are given the right tools, support, and belief, there are no limits to what can be achieved.

Op-ed: The Bigger Picture of ACE

BLIND TENNIS IS A GATEWAY TO SO MUCH MORE.

The blind and visually impaired (BVI) community is large, with more than 7 million Americans, according to a 2021 study in *JAMA Ophthalmology* [1]. And, there is an obvious link between BVI and other illnesses, including depression [2].

Now, tennis is an important physical and mental escape for all of us in this community, regardless of visual status.

On an individual level, it gifts us grit, camaraderie, and resolve, to name a few. For the BVI community, blind tennis may be one of the *only* avenues to build and flex these skills. European blind tennis superstar Naqi Rizvi puts it best: he says the sport gives him “absolute freedom”.

At ACE, we know we’re empowering so much at the individual level. But we’re also setting the stage for so much more, beyond the individual level.

We’re setting an example for other sports to become truly accessible, offering healthcare professionals treatment for an increasing burden of psychiatric illness with something besides prescription medication (prescription tennis!), and building a platform that helps unlock additional funding for BVI initiatives (both in and out of tennis!) through awareness and advocacy. And it’s just the start.



Photos from our recent workshop in Orlando

[1] Flaxman AD, Wittenborn JS, Robalik T, et al. Prevalence of Visual Acuity Loss or Blindness in the US: A Bayesian Meta-analysis. *JAMA Ophthalmol*. 2021;139(7):717-723. doi:10.1001/jamaophthalmol.2021.0527

[2] Virgili G, Parravano M, Petri D, et al. The Association between Vision Impairment and Depression: A Systematic Review of Population-Based Studies. *J Clin Med*. 2022;11(9):2412. Published 2022 Apr 25. doi:10.3390/jcm11092412



Coming Up

JANUARY 2026: USTA SOUTHERN ANNUAL MEETING

FEBRUARY 2026: USTA KENTUCKY MEETING

Recent workshops

Orlando, Florida | December 5-6

ACE attended the USTA Coach Inclusion Summit, where coaches from multiple USTA sections participated in an on-court simulated demonstration designed to experience the game through the players' eyes. Coaches gained hands-on instruction, practical on-court techniques, and a deeper understanding of blind and visually impaired (BVI) tennis.

Pennsylvania | December 12-13

In partnership with USTA Middle States and USTA Central District, ACE trained 15 new coaches and volunteers in collaboration with Vision Resources of Central Pennsylvania. Attendees traveled from as far as Alaska to learn how to bring blind tennis programming to their regions, making this one of CPD's most meaningful initiatives of 2025 as they continue to grow the game.



Scan this QR code for a TikTok showing what the world looks like with different types of visual impairment. We use these glasses in our workshops, so coaches can truly empathize with players.

CONTACT US:

www.aceinblindtennis.org/

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