

Understanding the Role Parents Play in Junior Tennis Success

Phase 3: Interview Study of Top Tennis Players, Parents, and Coaches



INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF
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USTA RESEARCH GRANT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Executive Summary

Project Overview

One of the hottest topics in contemporary youth sports focuses on the role parents play in their children's sports experience. Over the last decade, numerous media reports have focused on inappropriate parental behaviors. In tennis, for example, a pattern of inappropriate actions by a parent of one highly ranked player led that parent to be barred from the French Open. In another widely reported case, the father of one international junior tennis player was imprisoned when he was found to have drugged his child's opponent in an effort to give his son the competitive edge on the court. In addition to these high profile cases, junior coaches from around the U.S. are reporting an increase in the frequency of over involved parents who pressure their children, interfere with coaching and unknowingly thwart both their child's love of the game and development of their tennis talent. Yet, we learned from junior tennis coaches in Phases 1 and 2 of this project that parents are essential to the development of the child and the athlete. Moreover, the coach's perception was that at least two-thirds of parents are positive sources of support for their children.

Thus, the role of parents both in junior tennis and youth sports at large is paradoxical—on one hand an apparent issue of growing concern, while on the other hand essential for enhancing involvement and talent development. The USTA Sport Science Committee funded this investigation recognizing the need for research on parental involvement in junior tennis. The study was designed to better understand the role that parents play in tennis talent development and success. It was conducted in three phases, the third of which is summarized in this report.



Phase 3 was designed to provide an in-depth examination of parental involvement in the development of top level tennis players by retrospectively interviewing outstanding USA Tennis players, one of their parents, and a coach who had a great deal of interaction with the parent during the junior tennis years. The interviews were rooted in the phases of talent development first published by Bloom (1985). Eight elite U.S. professional players were contacted and asked to take part in in-depth interviews about the role of their parents in their tennis career. Later a ninth player interview was added because one parent opted out of the study following the player interview (also rendering a coach interview for that player irrelevant). Consequently, 25 individuals were interviewed (9 players, 8 parents, 8 coaches). Selection criteria for being a participant were:

- American-born tennis players who were developed in some capacity by the USTA.
- Talented tennis player on the professional tour or playing some professional events and highly successful in ITF tournaments.
- Were of close to the same generation/age group.
- Parents and coaches were selected based on the players' perceptions of the most involved parent and the coaches who best knew their parents and were involved during the developmental years.

Major results from each phase of the study are summarized and highlighted below. Results are delineated in detail in the full report that is available from the USTA High Performance Division Website (www.highperformance.usta.com).

Phase 3 Results: Interviews with Top Tennis Players, Parents, & Coaches



Who were these 25 interviewees?

9 Top Tennis Players*	
Average Age	20.56 Years of Age (Range: 16-24 Years)
Gender	4 Male 5 Female
Ethnicity	Caucasian: 9
ATP/WTA Ranking (Year end 2003)	Average: 82.67 Men: 31.50 Women: 123.60
ATP/WTA Ranking (Year end 2004)	Average: 176.44 Men: 67.00 Women: 264.00
Multi-Sport Participation	Avg. Sports Played: 3.25 Avg. Sports Played Females: 3.2 (range 2-4) Avg. Sports Played Males: 3.5 (range 3-4)

*Note: A ninth player was added to obtain 8 triads (player-parent-coach) because one parent decided not to participate following the player's interview.

8 Parents of these Players*	
Average Age	54.86 Years of Age (Range: 44-63 Years)
Gender	4 Male 4 Female
Ethnicity	Caucasian: 8
Marital Status	6 Married 2 Divorced
Play Tennis Competitively	Yes: 4 No: 3
Compete in other Sports	Yes: 5 No: 3
Training as a Coach	Yes: 2 No: 5

*Only 7 parents responded to background survey. Some information about the eighth parent was obtained based on meeting the parent face-to-face prior to the interview.

7 Coaches of these Players*	
Average Age	47.33 Years of Age (Range: 37-60 Years)
Gender	**7 Male 0 Female
Ethnicity	Caucasian: 6
Years Coaching Experience	27.8 Years
Gender Coached	Boys and Girls: 5 Boys only: 0 Girls only: 0

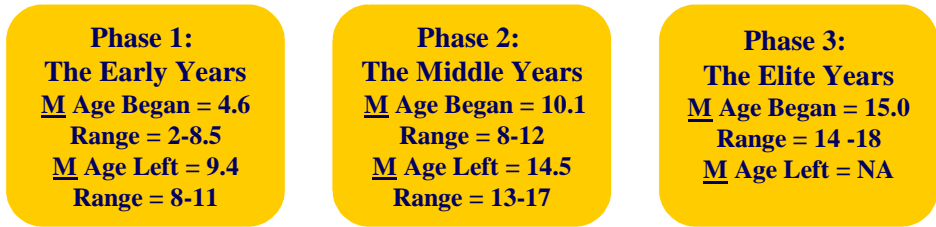
*Complete background data for only 5 coaches.

**One coach was interviewed twice for two different players.

Bloom (1985) conceptualized talent development in youth as occurring in three stages (early, middle, and elite) that the USTA has adapted these findings to tennis – the introduction/ foundation years; the refinement/transitional years; and the world-class performance years.

The figure below shows the ages at which participants in the study entered each phase and subsequently left. The mean age left the elite years is not provided because players are still in this phase.

Bloom (1985) Progressive Phases of Talent Development



PATTERNS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PARENTAL BEHAVIORS ACROSS THE CASES

Positive and Negative Parental Behaviors that Influence the Player

Early Years. The early years are the beginning phase of a child’s tennis development where he or she develops a strong liking of the game. Participation is often recreational with very little systematic training.



Eight Important Positive Parental Behaviors in the Early Years

Eight Important Positive Parental Behaviors in the Early Years
Provided Transportation
Provided Emotional, Logistical, and Financial Support
Provided the Opportunity and Resources
Provided Push to Play, but Did Not Pressure
Exhibited Emotional Control
Emphasized Fun
Stressed Good On-court Conduct
Helped Develop Child’s Talents by Hitting with Child (and sometimes coaching)

Note: Not all categories are listed, only those that were cited frequently and were triangulated by triad members. Themes are not listed in any hierarchical order.

Three Important Negative Parental Behaviors in the Early Years

Three Important Negative Parental Behaviors in the Early Years
Were Negative, Yelled, or Angry
Placed Too Much Pressure on Child, Over Pushed
Lost Healthy Perspective (sometimes over involved)

Note: Not all categories are listed, only those that were cited frequently and were triangulated by triad members. Themes are not listed in any hierarchical order.

“I think one of the reasons I ended up being successful professionally was because it was fun (in those early years)... I wasn’t starting like a lot of players, parents got involved with their kids...dragging them out there. The initial, whatever, spark, was that it was just fun...”

(Elite female tennis player)

Middle Years. The middle years are the developmental phase where a player begins systematic training multiple times per week and travels for competition. Players in this phase receive a great deal of coaching.

Ten Important Positive Parental Behaviors in the Middle Years

Ten Important Positive Parental Behaviors in the Middle Years
Provided Transportation
Provided Emotional, Logistical, and Financial Support
Provided the Opportunity for Involvement and Resources
Provided the Right Amount of Push to Practice/Held High Expectations
Provided Push to Play, but Did Not Pressure Child
Exhibited Emotional Control
Stressed Good On-court Conduct
Provided Supplemental Coaching/Instruction
Kept Tennis in Perspective
Ensured/Facilitated Good Coaching
Stressed/Instilled Hard Work

Note: Not all categories are listed, only those that were cited frequently and were triangulated by triad members. Themes are not listed in any hierarchical order.

“There were times that (the player) did not want to go to practice as he got older and we said no you are going. This is a commitment. You made a commitment. And if you don’t want to commit to something then you don’t do it. But we told him, life is full of commitments. So I mean if you got out of this commitment, what else are you going to get out of?”

(Parent of a successful male tennis player)

Eight Important Negative Parental Behaviors in the Middle Years

Eight Important Negative Parental Behaviors in the Middle Years
Too Much Tennis Talk
Emphasized Winning/Results
Pressured Child (often perceived by the child, but not the parent)
Reacted Emotionally at Matches
Restricted Player's Social Life
Were Negative/Critical
Were Over-involved (Didn't give enough space to player)
Moved for Player's Tennis Development which Negatively Affected Him/Her and the Family

Note: Not all categories are listed, only those that were cited frequently and were triangulated by triad members. Themes are not listed in any hierarchical order.

Elite Years. The elite years phase of development involves the player training daily with a master coach. Tennis takes a central role in the life of the player and he or she competes national and/or internationally.

Nine Important Positive Parental Behaviors in the Elite Years

Nine Important Positive Parental Behaviors in the Elite Years
Provided Emotional, Logistical, Managerial, and Financial Support
Provided the Opportunity and Resources
Exhibited Emotional Control
Stressed Good On-court Conduct
Lessened Involvement/Pulled Back Purposefully
Allowed Child Independence
Kept Tennis in Perspective
Provided Consistent and Stable Parenting
Helped with Professional Career Decisions
Helped to Make Good Decisions (Gave Advice)

Note: Not all categories are listed, only those that were cited frequently and were triangulated by triad members. Themes are not listed in any hierarchical order.

“A top-level coach should know how to motivate, encourage, discipline, they need to be the parent of their (the player's) tennis. And the parent needs to be more love, support, and backbone and friend. And finding those (boundaries) is the key and never crossing, never crossing...and knowing what your role is and doing it.”

(Elite male tennis player)

Six Important Negative Parental Behaviors in the Elite Years

Six Important Negative Parental Behaviors in the Elite Years
Emphasized Winning
Were Negative/Critical or Lacked Communication with Child
Did Not Allow Player to be Independent
Over-involved with Player's Tennis
Controlling of Player
Had Problems with Coach

Note: Not all categories are listed, only those that were cited frequently and were triangulated by triad members. Themes are not listed in any hierarchical order.

“...I feel very strongly about the pursuit of excellence in something...I think it is a tough world we live in, a tough world for children, to be excellent in something is like wearing a suit of armor, it protects you against so many things going on in the world that tear you down and make you feel less than good about yourself. And so in that sense, since it appears tennis was the thing (that his daughter was motivated to pursue), I did believe and I encouraged her to feel that it was a worthwhile pursuit to pursue excellence in her tennis, but it wasn't that it had to be tennis.”

(Parent of a successful female tennis player)

Synopsis of the Development of Talented Tennis Players and their Parents' Roles in the Talent Development Process

In this section of the results we attempted to identify effective and ineffective parental attitudes and behaviors that influenced the talent development process. Again, we urge parents, players, and coaches to realize that no parent can espouse all of these positive attitudes and exhibit all of these effective behaviors all of the time! Each and every parent and child has a unique history with unique personalities that make it impossible to provide a 'recipe' to parenting one's child successfully. Thus, *there is no one correct way to parenting one's child in junior tennis*. However, it is clear that the parents who had good relationships with their child at the end of the developmental years had a few core characteristics that made them successful including a healthy perspective of tennis where developing the child and having fun was always more important than winning, the use of many types of support and a great deal of it, and the ability to understand their shifting parenting role. Parenting a child in junior tennis is a very difficult and complex process requiring the parent to make sound decisions based on what is best for the child, even when there is pressure to win or to keep up with the rest of the tennis world. The figures on pages 8 - 10 summarize positive and negative parent-player interactions across the three phases of development. It is hoped that this depiction will provide a user-friendly way of remembering attitudes and behaviors to emphasize and to avoid. In this next section we will provide a temporal description of how players and parents may proceed through the developmental years.

All Positive Parental Behaviors Cited Across the Phases of Development

Successfully Parenting My Child Through the Phases of Talent Development

POSITIVE BEHAVIORS

<p>INTRODUCTION/FOUNDATION Phase One <i>Age of Player: 4.6-9.4</i> <i>Years in Phase: 4.8</i></p>	<p>REFINEMENT/TRANSITIONAL Phase Two <i>Age of Player: 10.1-14.5</i> <i>Years in Phase: 4.4</i></p>	<p>WORLD CLASS/ELITE PERFORMANCE Phase Three <i>Age of Player: 15.0+</i> <i>Years in Phase: NA</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided Transportation • Held Emotionally Intelligent Tennis Discussions • Provided General Support • Were Involved with Child in Tennis • Provided Emotional Support • Provided Logistical/financial Assistance • Provided Opportunities/Resources • Emphasized Multiple Sport Participation • Exhibited Emotional Control • Provided Encouragement • Didn't Pressure/Over-push • Pushed Optimally • Hit with Child • Provided Basic Instruction • Did Not Try to Coach • Served as Match Coach • Developed Child Athletically/Physically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pushed Optimally • Conditional Push • Didn't Pressure/Over-push • Exhibited Emotional Control • Were Positive and Stayed Positive • Provided Opportunities/Resources • Stressed Good On-Court Conduct • Parents Believed in Child • Provided General Support • Provided Logistical Support • Provided Emotional Support (at matches) • Provided Transportation • Provided Encouragement • Negative Actions Motivate Child • Parent Sacrifice/Effort • Provided Supplemental Coaching/Instruction • Held Emotionally Intelligent Tennis Discussions with Child • Picked up Balls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided General Support • Provided Logistical Support • Provided Managerial Assistance • Provided Financial Assistance • Parents Believed in Child • Provided Emotional Support • Provided Transportation • Exhibited Emotional Control • Became Less Involved/Pulled Back • Allowed Independence • Provided Opportunities/Resources • Stayed Positive • Provided Encouragement • Stressed On-Court Conduct • Stressed Education • Consistent/Stable Parenting • Helped with Education Plans • Helped to Make Good Decisions • Helped with Pro Career Decisions • Emphasized Work Ethic • Emphasized Fun

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taught Sport Psychology Skills • Made Sacrifice/Effort • Emphasized Fun • Focused on Hard Work and Development • Developed Player While Having Fun • Kept Tennis in Perspective/ Balance in Life & Tennis Stressed • Stressed Good On-Court Conduct • Taught Life Lessons Through Tennis • Made Tennis a Family Experience • Created and Maintained a Stable/Secure Home Life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kept Tennis in Perspective/Balance • Stressed Education • Stressed/Instilled Hard Work • Ensured/Facilitated Good Coaching • Emphasized Fun • Winning Not Overemphasized (performance focus) • Created and Maintained a Stable Home Environment • Taught Sport Psychology Skills • Helped Set Goals • Instilled Competitiveness • Taught Values/Life Lessons • One Parent Tennis Focused, the Other Not/Balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kept Tennis in Perspective/Balance • Gave advice to Child • Had Positive Interactions with Coaches • Communicated Effectively with Child • Didn't Pressure
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“It (feeding off tennis success) would be like a snowball going down a hill. You know it picks up speed and gets more bulk, mass and things like that. Pretty soon it is just going fast and pretty soon it is out of control. And that’s the tendency of this thing (junior tennis) is that a lot of people can get out of control as people get more and more success...”

(Parent of a successful female tennis player)



All Negative Parental Behaviors Cited Across the Phases of Development

Successfully Parenting My Child Through the Phases of Talent Development

NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

<p>INTRODUCTION/FOUNDATION Phase One <i>Age of Player: 4.6-9.4</i> <i>Years in Phase: 4.8</i></p>	<p>REFINEMENT/TRANSITIONAL Phase Two <i>Age of Player: 10.1-14.5</i> <i>Years in Phase: 4.4</i></p>	<p>WORLD CLASS/ELITE PERFORMANCE Phase Three <i>Age of Player: 15.0+</i> <i>Years in Phase: NA</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did Too Much for Child/Not Making Independent • Negative/Yelled/Angry • Placed Too Much Pressure/Over-push • Tennis Not in Perspective • Struggled with Parent-Coach Dual Role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too Much Tennis Talk • Did Not Develop Independence/Doing Too Much for Child • Emphasis on Winning/Results • Parent Approval Tied to Tennis Performance • Parent Pressured/Player Perceived Pressure • Parent Emotional Match Reactions • Parents Restricted Social Life • Parent Negative/Critical • Over-involved • Didn't Give Enough Space • Lack of Encouragement • Move for Tennis Negatively Affected Player • Move for Tennis Negatively Affected Family • Parent Embarrassed Child • Restricted Match Play • Misguided Tennis Development Decisions • Dual Role (parent-coach) Struggles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressured to Play Tennis • Reminded of Sacrifices • Emphasis on Winning • Did Not Allow to Be Independent • Over-involved • Bragged About Child • Parental Actions Led to Overtraining/Playing Too Much • Negative Reactions to Child's Tennis • Unrealistic Expectations • Restricted Social Life • Controlling • Concerned with money • Parent-Coach Problems • Gave Unwanted Advice to Child • Lack of Communication • Negative/Critical Communication

TRANSITION PATHWAYS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TENNIS TALENT

The 9 players in this study generally had three different transitions through these phases of development (listed below).



Smooth Transition through the Phases of Development (No apparent negative consequences)

- 4 players had a smooth developmental transition, 2 male and 2 female
- 2003 End of Year Average Ranking: 73.50 (3 Top 100)
- 2004 End of Year Average Ranking: 127.75 (3 Top 100)

Difficult Transition through the Phases of Development (With negative consequences often resolved)

- 3 players had a slightly difficult developmental transition, 1 male and 2 female
- 2003 End of Year Average Ranking: 109.67 (1 Top 100)
- 2004 End of Year Average Ranking: 260.00 (1 Top 100)

Tumultuous Transition through the Phases of Development (Negative consequences often unresolved)

- 2 players had a tumultuous developmental transition, 1 male and 1 female
- 2003 End of Year Average Ranking: 60.50 (2 Top 100)
- 2004 End of Year Average Ranking: 148.50 (0 Top 100)

“The elite years—that’s when they really pulled back...In the early years they were kind of easy, in the middle years they were a little more involved, a little more hard because they were trying to create values and show me what’s right and wrong...They started to pull back in the elite years...I normally would just go to tournaments with the coach...”

(Elite male tennis player)

Characteristics of Parents Across Player Tennis Talent Development Transitional Pathways

<i>Smooth Transition, No Apparent Negative Consequences Parent Practices</i>	<i>Difficult Transition, Consequences Often Resolved Parent Practices</i>	<i>Tumultuous Transition with Unresolved Consequences Parent Practices</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many more positive behaviors throughout all phases of development • Infrequent negative interactions in elite years • Kept tennis in perspective • Provided opportunities and resources • Very supportive • Not pushy • Exhibited emotional control • Pulled back in the elite years, allowed independence • Consistent in parenting going in and through the elite years • Effective communication and emotionally intelligent tennis discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many positive behaviors throughout, especially in early years • Communication an issue in elite years (earlier were holding emotionally intelligent tennis discussions) • Give advice to child (positive), but also was viewed as pushy or over involved at times • Restricted social life • Emphasis on winning • Pressure existed • Serious about tennis development of child which affected family (e.g., moved for tennis split up family) • Were sometimes viewed as negative/critical and had negative emotional reactions at matches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many positive behaviors throughout, especially in early years • Pressure existed to develop as a player and win • Very serious about training, often required child to do extra training which was beneficial but interfered with social activities and possible balanced life • Child was often viewed as an athlete first, and the child second in daily interactions • More negative interactions existed • Problems with coaches occurred frequently in the middle and elite years • Did not always change their parent role as pusher to supporter easily, thus not allowing independence • A good deal of push in middle and elite years

Positive and Negative Parental Behaviors that Influence the Coach's Ability to Develop the Player

Parent-Coach Interactions Tables of Categories

Positive Parent-Coach Interactions

<i>Early</i>	<i>Middle</i>	<i>Elite</i>
Found good coaches they liked	Provided information to coach about child	Avoided distracting coach
Let coach do his job	Parent reinforced coach's message with child	Supportive of coach
Demonstrated loyalty to coach	Supportive of coach	Parents got along well with coach
Open communication with coach	Had compatible goals/philosophy (coach and parent)	Trusted coach/let do his job
Did whatever the coach asked them to do	Open and effective communication with coach	Open and effective communication
Listened to the coach	Didn't discuss serious matters with coach in front of player	Much interaction with coach
Interacted a lot with the coach	Much interaction with coaches	Provided relevant information to coach about child
Good relations with coach (friends)	Didn't need to interact with coach all the time	Compatible goals/philosophy (coach and parent)
Miscellaneous	Got along well with coach	Parents knew role
	Trusted coach/let do his job	Gave coach extra opportunity to work with child
	Had child ready/prepared for tennis	Miscellaneous
	Parents knew role	
	Miscellaneous	

Note: The Miscellaneous category was created to group themes that did not fall under an existing theme.

Parent-Coach Interactions Tables of Categories

Negative Parent-Coach Interactions

<i>Early</i>	<i>Middle</i>	<i>Elite</i>
Miscellaneous	Wanted coach to give more attention to child	Parent unhappy with paying coaches
	Parents didn't fully trust/support coach	Parents using multiple coaches undermines coaching effectiveness/player development
	Disagreements on coach's decisions	Parent-coach disagreements
	Parental pressure to get results affected coach	Parent behaviors affect coach's ability to develop player
	Parent over-involved	Parent didn't recognize controlling, manipulative coach
	Parent behaviors affect coach's ability to develop player	Miscellaneous
	Miscellaneous	

Note: In early years, only 3 total negative quotes. Thus, as suspected during the interviews, parents created very few problems in the early years. The Miscellaneous category was created to group themes that did not fall under an existing theme.

“... (the parent-coach relationship) was very good; it was a very simple relationship. It was based on trust, they knew I was out there everyday for him. I care about the kid you know? They knew I was very highly motivated so they were happy. Because they knew I was expecting him to be the best player, that's it. I said “I work with you because I want you to win a grand slam.”

(Coach of a successful male tennis player)

Optimal Parent Push

*Optimal push was defined by the participants as the practice of parents at certain times needing to motivate a player because he or she is being lazy or is not doing what is needed to be successful, while at the same time not pressuring or inappropriately making the child do things against their well-being.

Does Optimal Parent Push Exist?

- Of the 25 interviewees, 19 agreed that it definitely exists (76%).
- Of the 8 player-parent-coach triads in this study, 3 triads were definitely in agreement that OP exists. In the 5 triads where agreement did not exist across the board, in only 1 case did a respondent say optimal parent push may not exist. In the other 4 triads 2 of 3 members agreed optimal push exists.
- Only 1 player contended that she never experienced optimal push. This was in direct conflict with the parent and coach who said that at times the player was optimally pushed.



Why Should a Parent Optimally Push their Child?

Reasons a Parent Should Optimally Push their Child
Child Does Not Know How Hard Must Work/Lacks Discipline
When Child is Talented and Wants to Excel in Tennis
Child Won't Make Elite Levels of Tennis Without Push
*Child Needs Pushing Because Not as Talented

Note: * denotes that this subcategory was only mentioned one time.

What Does Optimal Parent Push Involve?

Optimal Parent Push Involves:
Balance - Walking a Fine Line in One's Parenting
The Development of the Whole Person
Balancing Fun and Discipline
Parental Involvement and Commitment
Focusing on Development, Not Winning
Requiring Child to Follow Through on Commitments
Holding Child Accountable for Actions
Motivating the Child
Giving Opportunities and Pushing to Take Advantage of Them
Emphasizing the Discipline Needed to Practice

Note: The category 'Miscellaneous' is not included in this table.

What Factors Influence a Parent's Ability to Provide Optimal Push?

Factors Influencing Optimal Push:
Level of Player Self-motivation (i.e., child must have self-motivation to play tennis)
Push if the Player has the Potential to be Good
Player's Age (i.e., some participants believe should push more earlier and less later, others believe the reverse)
Child's Openness to Being Pushed
General Individual Child Differences
Balance in Parental Involvement (i.e., one parent involved in tennis, the other not)
Availability of Supportive Others to Assist Parent in Providing Optimal Push

Note: The category 'Miscellaneous' is not included in this table.

“...if you definitely see talent in them and they want to do it, I think pushing is fine, but there is a limit to it...not focusing so much on winning and losing, but focus on long term development...”

(Elite female tennis player)

What Happens When Optimal Parent Push Goes Wrong?

Factors that Led to a Non-Optimal Level of Parent Push:
Push Too Hard
Push to Win/Results Focus
Inappropriate Means of Pushing such as Being Over-involved or Using Guilt
Didn't Push Enough
Failed to Recognize Negative Player Reactions to Being Pushed

Note: The category 'Didn't experience optimal push' is not included in this table.

Sometimes I played before school and some days I wouldn't want to get up, and my parents would say 'okay, but, you want to play tennis and this is what you want to do, so we're just going to hold you to your word.'
 'You said you want to do this. We're going to hold you to it unless we hear otherwise.'

(Elite male tennis player)

Recommendations

To Parents

Player Recommendations to Parents

Top 9 Recommendations Players made to Junior Tennis Parents
1. Make Sure Other Things Going On in Life; Parents Shouldn't Let Tennis Become Child's Life
2. Listen to the Player and Don't Just Come Up with Your Own Ideas
3. Give the Right Direction, But Don't Push Over the Edge
4. Focus on Developing the Person Rather than the Athlete and Getting Results
5. Don't Have Your Child Specialize Too Early (doing other sports facilitates athletic ability and teaches how to compete)
6. Be Patient
7. Don't Live Through Your Child's Tennis Experiences ("We won, he lost.")
8. Allow Your Child to Dream, Don't Limit It, and Give Every Opportunity to Achieve the Dream
9. Be Emotionally Stable and Even-Keeled

Note: Not all categories are listed, only those that were cited multiple times.

Parent Recommendations to Parents

Top 9 Recommendations Parents made to Other Junior Tennis Parents
1. Be Very Careful to Maintain Balance in the Player's Life and as much Variety as Possible while Pursuing Tennis
2. Do Not Forsake a Child's Education for Tennis in the Hope that will Enable the Player to become a Great Pro (it may happen but the odds are against it)
3. Need Parental Support and a Stable, Together Family to be Successful
4. Emphasize and Let Child Have Fun (let him or her do other things)
5. Avoid Pressuring Your Child (put enough pressure on themselves)
6. Talk to Other Parents that have Gone Through the Process of Junior Tennis (especially about academies)
7. Allow Child to Play Team and Individual Sports
8. Developing Your Child's Talent is a Long Journey and Takes Great Effort
9. Keep Tennis in Perspective (only a few make the pros, it's just a game, and it is your child's game)

Note: Not all categories are listed, only those that were cited multiple times.

Coach Recommendations to Parents

Top 9 Recommendations Coaches made to Junior Tennis Parents
1. Look Very Hard, Diligently, and Carefully for a Coach and Stick with Him/Her
2. Help with Off-Court Stuff (e.g., stringing, taking care of details)
3. Important to have a Life Outside of Tennis
4. Stay Positive, Be Careful with Criticism (must be thought out and done with a purpose)
5. Push to Practice and Don't Go to All of the Matches
6. Trust the Coach to Do His or Her Job
7. Maintain a Strong, Stable Family Life
8. Become Less Involved and Allow Expert Coaches to Take Over Child's Development in Tennis
9. Teach Child to Learn Lessons from Losing

Note: Not all categories are listed, only those that were cited multiple times.

Practical Implications and Results Dissemination

This study has a number of important implications for tennis parents and coaches working with tennis parents. First and foremost, when conceptualizing this study and informally talking to tennis coaches about it we would hear statements like “I am not sure you can get a great player without a pushy parent” or “behind every great player is an over involved crazy parent.” While our results certainly showed pushy, over-involved parental behaviors were associated with the development of high-level players; we also identified a number of cases where parents of successful players, while highly involved, were not overbearing or pushy. In fact, some of the most successful players included in the study had parents, while highly involved, epitomized a more positive total child development focus. Thus, our results show that one does not have to be a pushy, overbearing parent to facilitate tennis talent development and several cases showed that doing so, while leading to a high level of performance, results in a damaged parent-child relationship, psychological issues with the player and, ironically, motivation and performance issues.



Our results, especially when integrated with Phases 1 and 2 of the larger project, suggest that parents need to be better educated concerning the tennis talent development process and their role within that process. The specific parental behaviors and actions that were retrospectively identified by the players, parents and coaches as both positively and negatively influencing developing players must also be disseminated to current junior tennis parents. To accomplish this we have developed two tools for parents: (1) a parent behavior self-assessment; and (2) a role of parents across phases of talent development guidelines handout. These have been incorporated as activities into two power point presentations available to interested parties on the USA Tennis Player Development Website (www.highperformance.usta.com).

The results of this and two earlier phases of this investigation are being disseminated in several other ways. First, several articles summarizing the project and its implications for coaches will be written for *Sport Science for Tennis*. Second, results were presented at the 2005 USTA Area Training Center workshop and at the 2005 US Open Tennis Teacher's Conference.

Conclusion

Developing a talented child's tennis ability is a worthy goal and one that both child development and tennis experts are interested in. However, more needs to be known about the best ways to accomplish this task and the benefits and costs of doing so. This study was designed to examine this issue.

The results of our interviews with talented players, their parents and coaches showed that parenting potential champions is a complex and challenging process with few black and white or simple answers. Moreover, parents are not necessarily prepared for engaging in this process and often find themselves in this all-encompassing environment before they recognize it. Most interesting were our findings that while players generally developed within previously specified stages of athletic talent development, several approaches could be taken to helping them transition through the phases. Some parents were found to help shepherd their child through the process in a relatively smooth fashion with few psychological consequences whereas others unknowingly did things in a tumultuous manner that resulted in major parent-child and motivation issues. By looking across all parents and comparing those who differed in their transitional strategies effective and less effective parenting actions were identified.

Given these results, the time has come to better equip sport parents in general and tennis parents in particular through extensive educational efforts. Parents must understand that developing their child's tennis talent can come with a cost. Knowing this, parents then can make more informed decisions. The findings of this investigation provide important information that can serve in this regard. Therefore, it is our recommendation that the USA Tennis High Performance Program continue to make efforts to do so.