

# **Being a Better Tennis Parent**

## **Guidelines to help the parents of young tennis players**

**By The International Tennis Federation**

**Published by the ITF Development Department**

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## INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that tennis is one of the healthiest, least injurious sports youngsters can play. Tennis is a lifetime sport. It builds self-confidence and self-esteem. It teaches self-discipline, self-reliance and respect for others. But, above all, it provides a good way of performing physical exercise whilst having fun. Today, more children than ever before are taking part in tennis.

However, there's a big difference between learning the basic strokes to play the game at recreational level, and competing successfully at a high level.

Individual competitive sports like tennis usually teach the youngsters to work hard, to learn to manage stress, to perform under pressure, and test emotional and physical balance. However, they can also impose pressures which are damaging if handled wrongly.

Sometimes competitive junior tennis can be especially difficult for both parents and children because there are many factors which affect this competitive environment which are usually new for everybody.

For parents, competitive tennis can become a complex experience, especially if they themselves have not played at a competitive level before. For youngsters, problems occur because too often, the demands that competitive tennis place on them seem to lie beyond their control and abilities.

You, as a parent, want to help your child to manage this new situation, as you do in other aspects of your child's life: school, friends, family, etc. You want your child to be happy, to have fun and to learn to play tennis to a reasonable level. No doubt that's why you encouraged them to be involved in the sport in the first place.

You know that it is not easy to be a good parent and, it is even harder to be a good parent of a tennis player. To know what is best to do to help your child and also when and where to do it, is not easy.

There are a lot of questions to ask but it is difficult to know who to ask and for the most part, there are no clear answers or guidelines to follow. Many problems occur because parents are unsure as to how they can best help their child and so use their natural instincts. In doing this, they go wrong far more often than they go right.

Interestingly enough, research has shown that the support and interest of the parents is crucial to the child's continued participation in tennis. However, it has also shown that much of the physical and emotional stress affecting the games of junior tennis players is caused by their **parents**. The consequences of excessive stress in junior competitive tennis are uniformly negative and often lead to burnout. Moreover, if parents put unnecessary pressure on their child, this also can damage their parent/child relationship.

The reality is that parents have a very important role to play in their child's tennis activity, whatever the level of participation. Parents need, however, to be trained and prepared for the role they have to play in this team.

Hence the reason for this document which has been written to help you, the parent, to perform better within the highly complex and sometimes, confusing world of competitive tennis. It is written to inform and to provide guidelines on how to best help your child so as to ensure that you, as well as your child, enjoy your involvement in tennis. We hope that you find the information useful in your tennis parent role wherever in the world it may be.

## PARENTS AND TENNIS AS A SPORT

- Focus mostly on performance instead of focusing only on tennis results or outcomes.
- Reward effort/hard work ahead of success. **AVOID** rewarding only results.
- Promote the perspective that tennis is only a sport emphasising its value as a preparation for life. **AVOID** making tennis bigger than life by for instance, placing more importance on tennis than school work.
- As a tennis parent, try to understand and have empathy with the emotional pressures and the complexity of the sport itself. **AVOID** underestimating the stresses of an individual sport like tennis.
- Give your children tasks and responsibilities which will in time, build self confidence and independence. **AVOID** making them overly dependent on you.
- Ensure that the tennis competitive experience is a positive one, principally from the perspective of developing the person. Emphasise the important elements of sportsmanship, ethics, personal development, responsibility and a positive attitude towards others and by doing so, share with your child a healthy interest in a great sport. **AVOID** allowing training and competition to become a negative experience for you or your child.
- Realise that children not only have the right to participate in tennis but also, to chose not to participate.

- Let your child know you care and are there if they need you to help them. **AVOID** becoming over involved in your child's tennis.
- Be prepared to listen and learn. **AVOID** thinking that you know everything about tennis.

### **PARENTS AND THEIR SONS AND DAUGHTERS**

- Be ready to help emotionally and offer encouragement especially when your children face hard times. **AVOID** using punishment and withdrawal of love, affection and warmth to get your children to try harder or perform better.
- Make your child feel valuable and reinforce his self-esteem especially when he loses. **AVOID** criticising your children's results.
- Clearly state that your child is playing and you will be there encouraging him if he wants you to be. **AVOID** saying, "We're playing today," as if you were going to be on court too.
- Recognise your child's achievements in tennis but keep their feet firmly on the ground by keeping sporting results in perspective. **AVOID** placing them on a pedestal.
- Emphasise that, "Win or lose, I love you just the same". **AVOID** getting upset or treating your child differently when he loses.
- Stay throughout the match and show your child by not overreacting to positive or negative situations, that regardless of the score, you care and you value his effort. **AVOID** walking away from a match because your child is doing badly.
- Ask questions such as, "How was the match?", "How did you play?", "Did you enjoy it?", which show you care about your child and their performance/enjoyment rather than the result. **AVOID** asking, "Did you win?" after your child comes back from a match.
- **AVOID** over training and burnout. Don't forget that your child is still growing.
- Be supportive (financially and otherwise), reinforcing that you are happy to support your child's involvement in tennis. **AVOID** fostering guilt by making your child feel that he owes you for the time, money and sacrifices you have made.
- Try to encourage your child to be independent and to think for himself. **AVOID** coaching from the sidelines.
- Following a loss by your child, keep the loss in perspective by emphasising that it is only a tennis match. However bad the result was, the world hasn't come to an end and the sun will come up again tomorrow. **AVOID** verbally or physically abusing your child, particularly following a loss.
- Try to be honest and consistent when communicating with your child about his tennis. **AVOID** lying.
- Encourage your child to take responsibility for their success or failure and to face up to the reality of the match and their actions (e.g. "it was the same surface for both of you"). The main objective should be, whatever the conditions, to help them to focus on trying their best. Then they will always be "true winners". **AVOID** making excuses for your child ("the court was too slow", "the opponent was lucky", blame the umpire etc.).
- Show your interest in your child's tennis by attending events occasionally. However, **AVOID** attending every practice and every match.
- Let the coach decide how much your child should practice. **AVOID** criticising your child for failure to play more tennis, or forcing him to train. Remember when it comes to training, quality is more important than quantity.
- Understand the risks and look for the signs of stress (sleeplessness, hypercriticism, cheating, etc.). **AVOID** being insensitive to your child's expressions of insecurity and anxiety, resulting from their involvement in competitive sport.
- The only expectation that you should have from your child's involvement in tennis is that playing tennis will help your child to become a better person and athlete. Anything else will be a bonus. **AVOID** assuming or expecting that your child will become a successful professional tennis player.
- Encourage your child to play other sports, to build relationships and to participate in other activities. **AVOID** forcing your child to focus entirely on tennis.
- Compare your child's progress with his own abilities/goals. **AVOID** comparing your child's progress with that of other children.
- Try to motivate your child in a positive and caring way (eg. positive reinforcement). A ratio of 3 : 1 positive comments to each negative one is a good guide for giving effective feedback to your child. **AVOID** harassing or using sarcasm to motivate your child.

- Ensure your child respects the principles of good sportsmanship, behaviour and ethics. **AVOID** ignoring your child's poor behaviour (cheating, using abusive language or treating others with disrespect) or overlooking critical areas of your child's development at the expense of tennis. If this type of behaviour occurs, get involved quickly and be prepared to act if his behaviour is unacceptable.
- Reward your child for what he is as a human being not as a tennis player. **AVOID** tying special privileges, prizes, external rewards, etc., to winning in tennis.
- Understand that you and your child need to share other interests and will often need a break from tennis. **AVOID** arguing or spending too much time speaking about tennis with your child.
- Your child's welfare and well being is the most important thing. **AVOID** letting your child's tennis become more important to you than your child.
- Realise that tennis players usually need some space when they lose. A pat on the back or an unemotional word of encouragement is often sufficient as the player leaves the court. You can discuss the match when they are less emotional. **AVOID** forcing your child to talk with you immediately after a loss.
- Take injuries seriously and if in doubt consult a doctor. Don't ignore aches and pains and **never** force your child to play when injured.
- Let your child know that you are ready whenever possible to provide transportation for them to tournaments and practice. **AVOID** insisting on accompanying your child to every lesson and match.

### **PARENTS THEMSELVES**

- Try to look positive, content, determined, calm and relaxed during matches. **AVOID** showing negative emotions by looking nervous or disgusted on the court side when, for example, your child makes a silly mistake.
- Keep your sense of humour and try to have fun through your child's tennis. **AVOID** acting negatively or appearing overly critical. Know that it takes emotional control to be a good tennis parent.
- Stick to your parental role. **AVOID** trying to be your child's coach (i.e. become too involved in strategy, technique, etc.).
- Live your own life apart from tennis. Remember you have personal needs too. Don't totally neglect them. **AVOID** trying to live out some of your unfulfilled dreams through your child's tennis.
- Recognise and be generous in your applause of the performance and effort of your child's opponents. **AVOID** ignoring or criticising your child's opponents.

### **PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN'S COACH AND OTHERS**

- Have respect for your coach's expertise. **AVOID** criticising the teaching methods of your child's coach.
- Ensure that the coach is keeping the right perspective by being positive, encouraging and promoting good life values (see ITF Coaching Code of Ethics). Ensure that your child's coach has signed up to the ITF's Coaching Code of Ethics. **AVOID** allowing the coach to be too pushy, negative or results-oriented, or to enrol your child in excessive training, etc.
- Establish clear lines of communication and try to meet regularly with your child's coach to ask about your child's progress and to discuss shared goals and the emotional development of the child. **DON'T** avoid meeting or communicating with the coach.
- Prior to hiring a new coach for your child, ensure that any previous coach - student relationship has been ended in a professional and ethical manner.
- Understand that your child's coach is a qualified professional who can help your child in many areas, both tennis and others, and also help you to understand and to know more about tennis. Assist the coach by helping them through your experiences to gain insights into and a better understanding of your child's personality and feelings. **AVOID** considering the coach as merely an employee or "ball feeder" who has only professional goals.
- Be generous in recognising the good play of your child's opponent. As you can help one another, work to build good relations with other parents.
- **AVOID** developing poor relations with other parents and making enemies with your child's opponent's parents.
- Try to keep a balance between tennis and the interests of the other members of the family. **AVOID** overlooking other children in the family.

### **GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT OF A TENNIS PLAYER**

There are several competencies that players should develop as they strive for independence and success in competitive tennis. In the following table the main characteristics of the different stages of player development are illustrated. The information in the table should give parents an insight into the possible commitments/path ahead for their child in tennis.

Age Appr .	% Tennis: Non tennis	Physical conditioning General and co-ordination & movement development	Tactical-Technical development training	Competition and competitive training	Coaching implications
6-8	30:70	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in many different sports</li> <li>• Try to develop all-round co-ordination</li> <li>• Approx. 2 ½ h/ week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-operate with the partner</li> <li>• Keep ball in play</li> <li>• Approx. 1 ½ h/ week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini-tennis team competition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High amount of variety, fun, free play and creativity</li> </ul>
9-10	50:50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in ball sports e.g. football, basketball</li> <li>• Development of footwork, movement</li> <li>• Approx. 4 ½ h/ week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop rough form of all strokes</li> <li>• Introduce all tactical phases of play</li> <li>• App. 4 ½ h/ week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approx. 15 singles and 30 doubles per year</li> <li>• Round Robin tournament</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good demonstrations required</li> </ul>
11-12	55:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop reaction speed, flexibility, strength training</li> <li>• Participation in complementary sports</li> <li>• Approx. 5 h/ week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop attacking gamestyle and strategy</li> <li>• Refine strokes and technique</li> <li>• Approx. 6 h/ week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50 singles &amp; 30 doubles/ year</li> <li>• Regional and National tournament</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach to put emphasis on performance and process goals rather than outcome goals</li> </ul>
13-15	65:35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop speed endurance, strength</li> <li>• Participation in complementary sports</li> <li>• Approx. 8 h/ week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop power on serve and groundstrokes</li> <li>• Develop individual but adaptable gamestyle</li> <li>• Approx 12 h/week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 70 singles &amp; 35 doubles per year</li> <li>• National and international events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach should ensure that emphasis is placed upon player being responsible for their own tennis</li> </ul>
16-18 and more	70:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full development of aerobic endurance, strength training</li> <li>• Approx. 8 hours per week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fully develop individual style</li> <li>• Further development of groundstrokes</li> <li>• Ap. 15-20 h/ week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80-100 singles and 40-50 doubles per year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach to be more of a planner/ organiser to a player</li> </ul>

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING INDEPENDENCE AND A PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE IN YOUR CHILD**

All coaches and parents should realise that to develop a professional attitude in young players is a long term process that takes many years. With this in mind we should start influencing players in this area at a very early stage - actually from the very beginning of their tennis careers!

Of course, responsibilities and tasks that we give them should be appropriate to their age! The following are some examples of undertakings that are reasonable to expect from players of different ages. By increasing their responsibilities and consequently their self-confidence and independence - a kind of "embryo" for a real professional attitude is put in place.

### Under 12

At this age they should:

- prepare things themselves,
- pack their bags before practice (racket, balls, spare shirt, bottle of water etc.),
- always be on time for practice,
- learn basic tennis rules (how the game is counted, the time between points and changeovers etc.).

### Under 14

At this age they should:

- warm-up correctly before practice and matches, without being asked or supervised by the coach,
- develop a correct drinking regime (stick to it even when practising),
- send in entries for tournaments themselves,
- find their doubles partner themselves,
- deliver their rackets for restringing, ask for required tension etc. themselves.

### Under 16 - 18

#### **In practice:**

Whether playing with or without the coach present, the player at this age should:

- practise with quality and intensity at all times (full concentration and best effort),
- maintain emotional control (both in practice and matches).

#### **During tournaments:**

The players should:

- book practice courts and get practice balls themselves,
- arrange wake-up calls,
- scout their next opponents themselves,
- maintain good eating habits (choose the right foods - plenty of fruit and vegetables, pasta, fish, white meat; if necessary go and buy proper things instead of eating junk food),
- find their own, most effective way to prepare for matches,
- put everything into their bag for the match (including blister tape, spare laces, pieces of chocolate or bananas, spare shorts, shirt and socks, soft grips, towel etc.),
- string their own rackets (when home),
- fully understand the tournament levels (junior, satellites etc.), ranking system, tournament rules (when to sign for lucky-losers list, for doubles) and know the tennis rules in detail,
- find out when their next match is,
- evaluate their performance after a match.

Often the above tasks are performed by the parent or coach who feel that this is helping the player. Whilst the parent/coach should assist the players in performing these tasks (advice, guided discovery etc.), their objective should be, as far as possible, to make the player less dependent and able to stand on his or her own two feet. Remember the coach/parent will not always be with the player!

By gradually giving increased responsibility to young players, we build up and create their independence and self confidence which in turn, leads them very naturally, to a professional attitude. The ultimate goal of coaches/parents should be to make the players less dependent on them.

### **STRUCTURE OF WORLD TENNIS**

Although each country is different, a similar structure of tennis does exist and is applicable to almost all of the world.

The base of the world's tennis structure is the **SCHOOLS** and the **CLUBS** (public or private). It is here that most players are introduced to tennis. Clubs and schools are the "engine" of tennis and they constitute the "grassroots" of tennis. It is important that when players start playing and competing at club and school level, it is in a positive environment which allows them to enjoy and have fun through tennis.

Clubs and schools are often affiliated to provincial, local or county federations/associations which are responsible for the development of tennis in their particular area. These tennis bodies usually organise their own training and competitive programmes.

These localised federations/associations are usually affiliated to a **NATIONAL** Federation/Association which acts as the governing body of tennis in a nation. The National Federation is responsible for the development of tennis in the nation.

National Federations usually run national and international events and are responsible for the selection of national teams and high level training programmes for all categories, age groups and levels of play in their country.

The National Federations or Associations are usually affiliated to **REGIONAL** Associations or Confederations which represent each continent and to the **INTERNATIONAL TENNIS FEDERATION** which is the governing body of tennis in the world. More than 200 National Associations are affiliated to the ITF. The ITF is responsible for junior, veteran and wheelchair tennis events around the world, for the Rules of Tennis, a Worldwide Development Programme, The Davis Cup by NEC (for men), The KB Fed Cup (for women), The Hopman Cup (for men and women), and The Olympic Tennis event. It is also responsible for administering a year-round Women's Circuit for up-and-coming professional players, as well as for overseeing a comprehensive programme of men's professional tournaments, including the Satellites and Futures. The ITF also sanctions and recognises the four Grand Slam Championships: The Australian Open, Roland Garros, The Championships, Wimbledon and The US Open, together with the following International Tennis Championships: The Japan Open, The Italian Championships, The International Championships of Spain, The Swiss Open and The German Open. The ITF is represented in the Grand Slams and has an interest and oversees the running of the Compaq Grand Slam Cup.

### **NATIONAL COMPETITIONS**

Players usually start training and competing at club and local level. They will often take part in the competitions organised for their appropriate age groups and categories. If they improve their performance, they may start to compete nationally. Each nation annually conducts a number of national junior and senior events. These events are generally used as a basis for determining national ranking and to determine which players should get the opportunity to participate in international events. Once players have achieved success (high ranking) nationally, they can begin to focus internationally.

## **INTERNATIONAL JUNIOR TENNIS**

At the International Junior level, all players must be entered by their National Association into the event. International Junior events include:

### **REGIONAL CIRCUITS (14 & UNDER AND 16 & UNDER)**

A number of international events for players aged 14 & Under and 16 & Under are held every year under the approval of Regional Associations. Circuits are currently held each year in: Europe (ETA), Central American & Caribbean (COTECC), South America (COSAT) and Asia (ATF). The ITF Development Department also funds and conducts 14 & Under Regional events in East Africa, West Africa, South Africa, West Asia, East Asia, Central Asia, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Eastern Europe. However, at the 14 & Under and 16 & Under level, there is no official ITF world ranking of players.

### **ITF JUNIOR CIRCUIT**

Through the ITF's member nations, world ranking junior tournaments for players aged 18 & Under are staged throughout the year. Each year over 150 events are held in close to 100 countries on the ITF Junior Calendar.

#### **i. How does the Circuit work?:**

Tournaments are graded according to the strength of entry, with more ranking points being awarded for the eight major championships, which include the four Grand Slam junior events. The player's best six tournament results count towards their ranking.

To be ranked, a player must reach a round where points are available (see points table). Any player winning three Group A tournaments is eligible for bonus points and points are also awarded for regional closed championships and team competitions (B1, B2 and B3 events).

The results of more than 4,500 competitors are fed into a computer each year at the ITF's London headquarters to produce the official 18 & Under Junior World Rankings for singles and doubles. Players must be entered into ITF sanctioned events by their National Association.

#### **ii. Junior World Champions:**

The players leading the singles and doubles rankings at the end of the year are declared Junior World Champions and are honoured, along with the professional World Champions, at the ITF Champions Dinner during Roland Garros.

Past champions have included several who went on to win senior Grand Slam titles, including Pat Cash, Stefan Edberg, Ivan Lendl, Hana Mandlikova, Gabriela Sabatini and Martina Hingis.

Edberg, the 1983 Junior World Champion, is the only player to have achieved a junior Grand Slam, by winning the junior titles at the Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the US Open in the same year.

#### **iii. 1999 Junior ITF Circuit Singles Points Table (Tournaments and Regional Championships):**

	<b>A</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>B1</b>	<b>B2</b>	<b>B3</b>	
<b>Winner</b>		250	150	100	60	40	30	180	120	80
<b>Runner-up</b>	180	100	75	45	30	20	120	80	50	
<b>Semi-Finalists</b>		120	80	50	30	20	15	80	60	30
<b>Quarter-Finalists</b>	80	60	30	20	15	10	60	40	15	
<b>Losers in last 16</b>	50	30	20	15	10	5	30	25	5	
<b>Losers in last 32</b>	30	20	-	-	-	-	20	10	-	

#### **iv. The Junior Link to the Professionals**

The Junior World Ranking circuit has acted as a stepping stone to many current top players. Research into past end of year ITF Junior World Rankings has shown that 50% of the players in the top 10 went on to break into the top 100 on the men's or women's professional rankings.

This is illustrated by the following figures which show the number of top 10 ITF Junior World ranked players that eventually reached the top 100 in the men's and women's game (as at June 1995).

	<b>BOYS</b>	<b>GIRLS</b>	
<b>1985</b>	4	4	
<b>1986</b>	7	7	
<b>1987</b>	7	5	Average number of boys 5.2 per year
<b>1988</b>	6	6	
<b>1989</b>	8	6	Average number of girls 5.1 per year
<b>1990</b>	2	4	
<b>1991</b>	3	4	

This link was highlighted further by an analysis of the top 30 Junior boys and girls from year end 1993. This analysis showed how the top juniors had performed in the Pros after 4 years (by the year end 1997).

### **Women**

25% made it into the top 100  
51% made it into the top 150  
70% made it into the top 200

### **Men**

26% made it into the top 100  
53% made it into the top 200  
61% made it into the top 300

### **Conclusion**

Reaching the top 30 of the ITF Junior World Rankings is a good indicator of success in the Pros and therefore, players looking to become professional players should in most cases try to first prove themselves in junior tennis before focusing exclusively on professional events.

### **JUNIOR EXEMPTS**

A Junior Exempt programme is operated by the ITF Women's Circuit for Junior female players who obtain a top 10 end of year Junior ITF ranking. The programme offers the players places in the main draw at ITF Women's Circuit events. The number 1 player at the year end receives direct entry into the main draw at three US\$75,000 ITF Women's Circuit events. The programme helps the top female juniors with the transition from the junior to the professional game. No Junior Exempt programme is currently operated for boys by the ITF Men's Circuit.

### **ITF SUNSHINE CUP AND ITF CONNOLLY CONTINENTAL CUP**

In 1997 the ITF assumed ownership and responsibility for the Sunshine Cup (founded 1958) and the Connolly Continental Cup (founded 1976) which foster team competition amongst the world's best 18 & Under boys and girls.

Held at the end of the year in Florida, USA, these Cup Competitions are the last stop for many players before they embark on a full-time career in professional tennis.

### **NEC WORLD YOUTH CUP**

In 1985 the ITF launched the World Youth Cup, an international team competition for players aged 16 & Under, open to all member nations of the ITF. Sixteen teams of both boys and girls battle through from five regional qualifying events worldwide to contest the final which is staged in one venue during one week. The event is rotated between countries each year. In 1998, the competition attracted entries from 82 member nations of the ITF.

Participation in the NEC World Youth Cup is often a big step towards international recognition for many players. Jim Courier and Michael Chang of the United States, Goran Ivanisevic of Croatia, Yevgeny Kafelnikov of Russia, Andrei Medvedev of Ukraine, Anke Huber of Germany and 1996 Olympic gold medalist, Lindsay Davenport of the United States, are just a few of the current top professional players who have competed in this ITF junior team initiative.

### **WORLD JUNIOR TENNIS COMPETITION**

The World Junior Tennis Competition was established in 1991 and is the World Team competition for boys and girls aged 14 & Under. Teams compete in five regional qualifying zones to earn a place amongst the top sixteen boys' and sixteen girls' teams in the final. The Finals have been held in Japan for the last 8 years but will move in 1999. The competition attracted entries from 84 ITF member nations in 1998.

Players who first sampled international tennis in this Competition and have since captured junior Grand Slam titles include: Meilen Tu, 1994 US Open girls' singles; Siobhan Drake-Brockman, 1995 Ford Australian Open girls' singles; Bjorn Rehnqvist, 1996 Australian Open boys' singles; Alberto Martin, 1996 French Open boys' singles; David Nalbandian, 1998 US Open boys' singles; Arnaud di Pasquale, 1997 US Open and World Champion; Katarina Snebotnik, 1998 Wimbledon girls' singles.

### **THE PROFESSIONAL GAME**

Once players have proven themselves at the Junior level, they can begin to focus more on the professional game. The first level of opportunity for professional players to acquire the computer ranking points for both men and women are: The ITF Men's Circuit, including Satellite Circuits and Futures tournaments, and the The ITF Women's Circuit.

A men's Satellite Circuit involves four weeks of tournaments. The first three weeks usually have a 32 draw with 8 places reserved for qualifiers, 20 places reserved for the highest ranked players entered and 4 places for players (wild cards) selected by the National Association hosting the Circuit. At the end of the first three tournaments, the best 24 players from

the first three tournaments qualify for the fourth tournament (the Masters). Only these 24 players receive world ranking points. Futures are individual tournaments scheduled in a minimum of three consecutive weeks of US\$10,000 each or two consecutive weeks of US\$15,000 each in prize money. Every year Satellites and Futures offer more than 400 tournament weeks with each Circuit's prize money ranging from \$25,000 to \$75,000. Futures and Satellites are organised by individual National Associations and many are subsidised by the ITF's Grand Slam Development Fund.

The ITF Women's Circuit offers more than 250 tournaments per year with prize money totalling \$4 million per annum. Prize money ranges from \$5,000 to \$75,000 per tournament. Events are staged in 63 countries around the world. The prize money for many of these events is funded by the ITF's Grand Slam Development Fund.

Successful performances in the ITF Men's and Women's Circuits allow players to move up to the next level of the professional competitive ladder.

The **ASSOCIATION OF TENNIS PROFESSIONALS** (ATP) runs a men's tour comprising over 80 one-week tournaments in close to 40 countries. The tournaments have a minimum prize money of \$25,000. The categories of tournaments are: Challenger Events: \$25,000 to \$125,000, World Series: \$125,000 to \$1,375,000, Championship Series: \$625,000 to \$1,500,000, and Super 9 Events: \$2,250,000 to \$3,300,000. The ATP World Championships at the end of the year involves the eight highest ranked players. The ATP also has a ATP Tour End of Year World Doubles Championship for the eight best ranked teams.

The **WOMENS' TENNIS ASSOCIATION** (WTA) runs a women's tour, the COREL WTA Tour which comprises nearly 60 events taking place in 27 countries on four continents. Close to 1000 players are ranked on the WTA Tour ranking. The tour culminates in the WTA Tour Championships in New York. The Tournaments are organised according to prize money: Tier I: tournaments having minimum prize money of \$1,050,000, Tier II (\$520,000), Tier III (\$180,000), Tier IV A (\$142,500), and Tier IV B (\$112,500).

### **A TYPICAL CAREER PATH FOR A JUNIOR TENNIS PLAYER**

A recommended career path for a top national junior boy or girl to follow would normally be:

- to first attain a top 2 national junior ranking in their country,
- to then focus on playing regional 14 and 16 & Under events aiming to achieve a high regional ranking (top 30),
- to then focus on playing the ITF Junior Circuit and try to achieve a top 20 ITF Junior World Ranking. This ranking will ensure direct acceptance into the Group A events (including the four Grand Slam Junior Tournaments). A junior working to achieve this top 20 ranking should also try to play some weeks of professional events per year for experience.

Once the player has achieved a top 20 ranking in juniors, he/she should then focus on improving their professional ranking by playing mostly ITF Men's/Women's Circuit events, along with the prestigious Group A Junior events. As shown by the statistics above, once they have proven themselves in juniors, they have a reasonably good chance of making it into the top levels of the professional game.

### **PLANNING A COMPETITIVE SCHEDULE**

A tournament planner is outlined below which should provide a guide for parents, coaches and players in organising a player's annual competitive schedule.

There are a number of important factors to take into consideration when trying to plan an optimal competitive schedule, which you should bear in mind when studying the tournament planner shown:

- **The age of the player:** There are age eligibility rules which limit the number of weeks of professional tennis a player under 16 years of age can play. Players under the age of 12 are also restricted to a total of 4 weeks of tournament play outside their country and cannot compete in 18 & Under Junior ITF Events.
- **The type of tournament to play:** Junior players 12 years old and above, who are aspiring to enter at some stage in the future, the top levels of the professional game, need to play a mix of tournaments including national, junior and some professional events and all of these on a variety of surfaces. This experience will help them to gradually build up the tools of their trade.
- **The number of weeks of tournaments per year:** This depends on the ranking goal the player is trying to achieve (see the recommended career path above) and on the education commitments of the player. It is necessary to plan the schedule so that the player can get sufficient competitive experience, whilst continuing their education. During holidays (approx. 20 weeks per year), a young player aged between 13 and 17 can play sufficient tournaments without negatively effecting their education. Remember only the six best tournament results count towards the player's Junior ITF world ranking. It is important, however, to build up a good relationship with a player's school and teachers to ensure that if the player does have to travel during school time, they can utilise their spare time whilst at the tournaments to work on their schoolwork.
- **Rest and regeneration:** It is not recommended to play more than 5 weeks in a row outside of one's own country. However the realities of the cost of travel may sometimes make it impossible to return to your home country and may make it necessary to play more than 5 events in succession. Adequate rest will help avoid injury and burnout from tennis.

- **The number and quality of matches per year:** Whilst there will always be exceptions, it is generally recognised that it is important to play a lot of matches between the ages of 12 and 18 in order to gain sufficient experience. By matches we mean “quality matches” i.e. ones in which the result is in doubt when the players go on the court. A reliable indicator of a good schedule is the player’s win/loss ratio which at the end of the year, should ideally be approximately 2 wins to every 1 loss. This means that whilst a schedule can and should be put together in advance, it may often be necessary to adapt the schedule mid-stream in order for the player to improve this ratio (i.e. play lower or higher level events).
- **Consideration about competition:** It is important for parents and coaches to realise that competition is not a bad thing. Competition is in fact, a very good thing. Usually the only problem is the over reaction to a player’s poor results by parents and coaches. The players should never avoid matches or “hide” from their opponents. By playing less matches, the players will, in time, face more pressure. By playing a lot of matches, on a lot of different surfaces, the matches themselves become routine and so the pressure reduces. For the player to reach a high level, they have to try to enjoy the challenge of playing matches and realise that some days they will win and some days they will lose. The important thing is that they try to give 100% in all of their matches, regardless of the situation. This is true mental toughness!
- **The ranking goal and focus of the player:** Junior players could choose to play in many different categories of events (obviously within the age eligibility rule). The decision as to which event to play will depend on the player’s focus. Their focus will depend on their current ranking goal. What are they trying to achieve? The evolution of a top player should involve the player first focusing on being No. 1 or 2 nationally. The player should then follow a career path (see above) gradually working through the various rankings goals listed in the chart above such as regional rankings, ITF Junior World Rankings etc. The player can and should still continue to play occasionally in other higher level events for experience, but should keep the focus on the ranking goal until it is achieved. Junior players should also not avoid playing tournaments in their own age group against their peers (e.g. national junior championships) as these type of “no win situations” for the top ranked player help to build courage and character. It is easy to play well when one is not expected to win. It is more difficult to play well when expected to win.
- **The cost of events / compiling a schedule:** Any tournament schedule should be compiled at least three months in advance. The following process is recommended in compiling a schedule. First put together an ideal schedule, i.e. what would you do if you had sufficient money. Next try and work out how much money the player can obtain from their Federation, club, family or from sponsors. Then based on the budget available, the player should try to play as much of the ideal schedule as possible. In putting this schedule together, bear in mind that Junior events usually offer hospitality for the player and the travelling coach and therefore, they will usually work out much cheaper to play than professional events where no hospitality is given. It also might be interesting to look at the types of places where the events are held as although the airfare may be a little more expensive, the actual costs involved in playing in certain regions are much cheaper.
- **Doubles:** Encourage your child to play doubles as not only is the team element important in the development of them as people but also, because playing doubles helps to develop a more attacking game style.
- **Conclusion:** Once a player reaches the age of 13/14 and they are technically sound, the technical training of the player becomes less and less important. What becomes more and more important is the organisation and planning of the player’s training and competitive schedule. Helping the player with this is a very important part of a coach’s and parent’s work.

AGE	TYPE OF TOURNAMENTS	WEEKS PER YEAR	MATCHES PER YEAR	APPROX. RANKING GOAL	APPROX. COST/YEAR
12-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National junior</li> <li>• International junior (World Junior Tennis Ch.)</li> <li>• National senior</li> <li>• Team/club</li> <li>• Women’s Circuit Events (\$10,000)</li> </ul>	5-10 2-5 4-8 3-6 1-2 TOTAL: 15-31	60/70 singles 25/45 doubles	National Age group: 1 ITF Junior: (girls top 100) Regional Junior Ranking: top 30 ATP: none WTA: 1,000-800	US\$ 7,000

15-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National junior</li> <li>Int. junior (NEC World Youth Cup)</li> <li>National senior</li> <li>Team/club</li> <li>ITF Men's Circuit (Satellite; \$10,000 - \$15,000 Futures)</li> <li>or</li> <li>ITF Women's Circuit Events (\$25,000-\$50,000)</li> </ul>	2-4 5-10 5-10 2-4  2-5 TOTAL: 16-33	70/80 singles 30/50 doubles	National Age group: 1 ITF Junior: top 50 ATP: 800 WTA: 800-200 Fed Cup Team	US\$ 12,000
17-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National junior</li> <li>Int. junior (ITF Sunshine &amp; Connolly Continental Cup)</li> <li>National senior</li> <li>Team/club</li> <li>ITF Men's Circuit (Satellite; \$10,000 - \$15,000 Futures)</li> <li>or</li> <li>ITF Women's Circuit Events (\$25,000-\$50,000)</li> <li>ATP Challenger or WTA Events</li> </ul>	1-2 10 5-10 2  12 2 TOTAL: 32-38	80/90 singles 35/55 doubles	National Age group: 1 ITF Junior: Top 20 ATP: 300 approx WTA: 250-80 Davis Cup/Fed Cup Team	US\$ 15,000
19+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nat. prize money</li> <li>Team/club</li> <li>ITF Men's Circuit (Satellite; \$10,000 - \$15,000 Futures)</li> <li>or</li> <li>ITF Women's Circuit events (\$25,000 - \$75,000)</li> <li>ATP Challenger Events</li> <li>WTA/ATP Tour</li> <li>Gr.Slam/Davis/Fed Cup</li> </ul>	5 2  8 - 10 3 - 6 2 - 8 2 - 4 TOTAL: 22-35	80/90 singles doubles 50+	National: Top 2 ATP: Top 150 WTA: Top 100	US\$ 25,000 (prize money may offset this cost)
21+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ATP Challenger Events</li> <li>WTA/ATP Tour</li> <li>Grand Slam</li> <li>Davis/Fed Cup</li> </ul>	10 13 4-8 4 TOTAL: 31-35	80/90 singles doubles 50+	National: 1-10 ATP: 100- 20 WTA: Top 50	Break even / making money

The above information provides guidance as to which events players should focus on at different ages. As girls mature physically earlier than boys (2 years approx.), they can usually begin to play professional events successfully at an earlier age than boys.

## **ITF COACHES CODE OF ETHICS**

The following is the ITF Coaches Code of Ethics. Parents of players playing at all levels and particularly on the international circuit, should ensure that their child's coach signs up to the code. Some of the elements of the code could be applied to, learnt from and used by parents.

### **CODE OF ETHICS FOR COACHES**

#### **The Tennis Coach Will**

1. Treat all students with respect at all times. Be honest and consistent with them. Honour all promises and commitments, both verbal and written.
2. Provide feedback to students and other participants in a caring manner sensitive to their needs. Avoid overly negative feedback.
3. Recognise students' right to consult with other coaches and advisers. Cooperate fully with other specialists (eg. sports scientists, doctors, physiotherapists etc.).
4. Treat all students fairly within the context of their sporting activities, regardless of gender, race, place of origin, athletic potential, colour, sexual orientation, religion, political beliefs, socio-economic status, and any other condition.
5. Encourage and facilitate students' independence and responsibility for their own behaviour, performance, decisions and actions.
6. Involve the students in decisions that affect them.
7. Determine, in consultation with students and others, what information is confidential and respect that confidentiality.
8. Encourage a climate of mutual support among your students.
9. Encourage students to respect one another and to expect respect for their worth as individuals regardless of their level of play.
10. At all times use appropriate training methods which in the long term will benefit the students, and avoid those which could be harmful.
11. Ensure that the tasks/training set are suitable for the age, experience, ability and physical and psychological conditions of the students.
12. Be acutely aware of the power that you as a coach develop with your students in the coaching relationships and avoid any sexual intimacy with students that could develop as a result.
13. Avoid situations with your students that could be construed as compromising.
14. Actively discourage the use of performance-enhancing drugs, the use of alcohol and tobacco and any illegal substance.
15. Respect the fact that your goal as a coach for the student may not always be the same as that of the student. Aim for excellence based upon realistic goals and due consideration for the student's growth and development.
16. Recognise individual differences in students and always think of the student's long-term best interests.
17. Set challenges for each student which are both achievable and motivating.
18. At all times act as a role model that promotes the positive aspects of sport and of tennis by maintaining the highest standards of personal conduct and projecting a favourable image of tennis and of coaching at all times.
19. Do not exploit any coaching relationship to further personal, political, or business interests at the expense of the best interest of your students.
20. Encourage students and other coaches to develop and maintain integrity in their relationships with others.
21. Respect other coaches and always act in a manner characterised by courtesy and good faith.
22. When asked to coach a student, ensure that any previous coach-student relationship has been ended by the student/others in a professional manner.
23. Accept and respect the role of officials in ensuring that competitions are conducted fairly and according to established rules.
24. Know and abide by tennis rules, regulations and standards, and encourage students to do likewise. Accept both the letter and the spirit of the rules.
25. Be honest and ensure that qualifications are not misrepresented.
26. Be open to other people's opinion and willing to continually learn and develop.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Obviously parental love and understanding is important in producing great tennis players. If all those involved; players, coaches, parents, understand that trying hard is the factor that ultimately defines a player, then tennis practice and competition will be a healthier activity for the youngsters.

Parents should act as role models by showing their children they can cope with the stress of competitive junior tennis. If parents, who are mature adults, can't cope ..... how can we expect young, often immature, players to cope?

Your child needs you most of all as his parents. In that role you are irreplaceable. Don't forget that your child is first and the tennis player comes second.

Tennis should be a healthy, enjoyable and positive experience for both parents and child. We hope that this document will help you to maintain a balanced approach to your child's tennis and above all, to have fun through your involvement in tennis.

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The authors want to thank the ITF Coaches Commission members, the ITF Development Officers and the staff in London who have assisted and advised in the preparation of this ITF Brochure, and also to the scores of coaches who have assisted the ITF in their educational programmes around the world. We would like to extend our special thanks to Ivo van Aken (Belgium), Piotr Unierzyski (Poland) and Aidan Moran (Ireland) for their contribution.

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Printed in Canada

ISBN 0 - 9514175 - 8 - 4

Note: Throughout this book the pronouns "he", "him" and "his" have been used inclusively, and are intended to apply to both men and women. The word "parent" could also apply to "carers" or guardians of children.

Photographers credits: Paul Zimmer and Giorgio Maiozzi.

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