

## THE PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON JUNIOR TENNIS PLAYERS

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**ABSTRACT.** This study has been made in order to better understand the role played by parents in obtaining tennis success by their children. In order to identify both positive and negative parental behaviours and strategies for maximising junior success by an efficient player-coach-parent triad. For reaching these goals a number of 14 junior tennis coaches in Cluj-Napoca answered a questionnaire. Results show that coaches think that parental involvement is crucial for success in junior tennis. Some principles related to the parental behaviour were identified as follows: the high expectations of parents because of the important financial investment, the opinion that tennis can produce a special parent-child relationship if correctly approached and the efficiency of parenting that emphasises virtues like fair-play or hard work, and not victory as the supreme goal. The coaches' answers emphasised the coaches' opinion that parents underscore victory and often have unrealistic expectations. On the other side, positive parental behaviour was related to the financial, logistic, social, emotional support and also to the sacrifices made by parents for providing opportunities for their children in order that they achieve success.

**Keywords:** *player-coach-parent relationship, parental role, junior, tennis, behaviour, strategy.*

**REZUMAT.** *Influența părinților asupra jucătorului de tenis junior.* Acest studiu a fost efectuat pentru a înțelege mai bine rolul pe care părinții îl joacă în obținerea succesului în tenis. A fost alcătuit un eșantion format din antrenori de tenis de pe raza municipiului Cluj-Napoca pentru a identifica acele comportamente ale părinților care sunt eficiente și a celor care sunt ineficiente, precum și strategii pentru maximizarea succesului printr-un parteneriat între jucător, antrenor și părinte. Pentru îndeplinirea acestor obiective, s-a aplicat un chestionar unui număr de 14 antrenori de tenis ai jucătorilor juniori din Cluj-Napoca. Rezultatele relevă faptul că antrenorii au calificat implicarea parentală ca fiind crucială pentru succesul în tenis. Au fost identificate și unele principii referitoare la comportamentul părinților precum așteptările ridicate ale părinților, dată fiind investiția financiară importantă, eficiența parentingului care nu pune accent pe victorie ci pe virtuți precum fair-playul

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și munca asiduă sau opinia că tenisul, abordat corect, poate produce o relație părinte-copil specială. Răspunsurile la chestionar au evidențiat părerea antrenorilor că părinții subliniază prea mult importanța victoriei și deseori au așteptări irealiste. Pe de altă parte, comportamentele parentale pozitive s-au axat pe sprijinul oferit (financiar, logistic, social și emoțional) și sacrificiile făcute pentru furnizarea de oportunități pentru copiii lor astfel încât aceștia să poată să aibă succes.

***Cuvinte cheie:** relație jucător-antrenor-părinte, rol parental, junior, tenis, comportament, strategie.*

## **Introduction**

The role of parents in junior's tennis is now controversial. More and more coaches report problems regarding the behaviour of junior tennis players' parents and unintended negative effects on their child's sporting development. Meanwhile, the coaches recognize that many junior tennis players have parents who are very involved in the work of children and tennis players so they instilled virtues necessary for success in tennis. They shared the view that most players cannot reach the top without support from their parents. However, paradoxically, parents are seen as essential for developing talent in tennis and simultaneously, a great detriment to some junior tennis players.

In Romania and the city of Cluj-Napoca there is little scientific research related to parenting issues in tennis. Therefore there is a significant need to study this branch of parenting and more specific, scientifically proven information on the identification of effective strategies and ineffective parenting. By doing this we could improve success by identifying techniques that facilitate player-coach-parent partnership.

## **Reviews from other researches related**

In order to study the influence of parenting on young athletes, the role that parents play in the psychological development of the athlete must be understood. The role of a parent to his child's sports experience can vary from being a driver or a fan to something more complex such as the role of coach. Also, parents shape the child's psychological development through its involvement in the sport experience. (Côté & Hay, 2002). No matter the degree of involvement of the parent, it will have a lasting impact on the experience of the young. As proof, research in sports psychology have shown that parents influence motivation and

competence (Brustad, Babkes & Smith, 2001), emotional consequences (Gould, Eklund, Petlichkoff, Peterson & Bump, 1991; Gould, Wilson, Tuffey & Lochbaum, 1993; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984) and developing sporting talent (Bauer, Gould & Martens, 2001).

Recent research showed clearly that parents play an important role in the experience of junior sportsmen. Their actions influence motivation and competence and a variety of emotional states such as satisfaction and anxiety both positive and negative. More recent studies have also begun to examine the role that parents and families play in the development of sporting talent, showing that parents are an important influence. However we should learn more about the effects of parenting. It is important to examine the positive and negative parental influences in the development of elite young athletes.

## Research Method

### *Survey - The role of parents in junior tennis players' success*

While an analysis of related research shows that parents play an important role in motivating athletes, emotional responses and the development of talent, it is ironic that many coaches opinions shows that parental involvement in tennis is a problem that interferes with the development of talent. Some coaches even suggest that it would be better if parents would not be involved in their child's tennis players experience. However, the literature shows that parents can have both a positive and a negative role in the development of sporting talent and the psychological state. Moreover, parents have legal and ethical reasons to be involved in this activity of their child. Therefore, it is imperative to better understand the issues of parental involvement in junior tennis and this study wants this.

In an attempt to better understand parental involvement in junior tennis, this study consisted in a survey applied to 14 tennis coaches in Cluj-Napoca in the May-June period of the year 2014. The purpose was to identify the perspective of coaches in Cluj-Napoca over the player-coach-parent triad.

The questionnaire was structured into nine distinct categories of questions as described below:

1. The importance and role of parents in the development of junior tennis player
2. The existence of the parental problem behavior
3. The seriousness of the parental problem behavior
4. Existence of positive parental behaviors
5. Impact of positive parental behaviors

6. Existence problems / bottlenecks encountered in working with parents;
7. Gravity problems / bottlenecks encountered in working with parents;
8. The importance of parental behaviors in junior tennis player;
9. The utility of strategies for working with parents of junior tennis players.

The questionnaire consisted of open and closed items. Coaches were also asked about some demographic and background information such as their experience in coaching or completed studies. Participants were assured of their anonymity at the beginning of the questionnaire. Questions were focused on identifying the coaches' perceptions on the parental role in the success of tennis players, on the positive or negative parenting practices and on the ways in which parents facilitate or affect the coach's activity.

In the end we calculated descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency count) using the SPSS software and the values obtained were interpreted.

## Results

Of the 25 questionnaires distributed to coaches in Cluj-Napoca, 14 were completed and returned (56%), resulting in a percentage of the sample that can be considered representative for the junior tennis players' coaches in the municipality of Cluj-Napoca.

Regarding the gender, 13 respondents were male (92.85%) and 1 woman (7.15%). The average age of respondents was 31.57 years. The mean of coaching experience was calculated as 11.32 years. Ethnic picture of coaches is: 13 Romanians (92.85%) and one Hungarian (7.15%). Regarding studies, six have obtained a bachelor degree (42.86%) and 8 have completed masterate studies (57.14%). The average number of junior players coached is 20.46 and the average national ranked players is 5.35. The average number of international ranked players coached is only 0.64.

The importance and role of parents in the development of junior tennis player from the perspective of coaches:

- Coaches reported that parents are very important for success in tennis juniors ( $M = 4.43$ , on a scale from 1 = not at all important to 5 = very important).
- 40% of parents were perceived as negatively affecting their child's athletic development.
- 56.07% of the parents were perceived as having a positive influence on their child.

Coaches were asked to rank how often they encountered or observed problem behaviors in parent-child relationships using the following scale: 1 = Never, 2 = almost never, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often 5 = Always

Most common behaviors were “Unrealistic expectations” (M = 4), “Lack of emotional control on the child’s play” (M = 3.79), “Pamper child too much” (M = 3.79) “Provides coaching the child (when parent is not the true coach)” (M = 3.64) and “Criticizes the child” (M = 3.57).

In part 2 of the question respondents were asked about their perception over the gravity of parental problem behaviors using the following scale: 1 = not at all serious, 2 = Very little serious, 3 = Somewhat serious, 4 = severe, 5 = extremely serious.

Behaviors considered most serious were: “Reaction to faults yelling at child” (M = 4.38), “Puts repeated pressure on child regarding how much tennis costs” (M = 4.31), “Not perceiving the child’s needs and motivating factors” (M = 3.92) “Contempt on child development” (M = 3.85), “Not supportive with the child” (M = 3.85).

Further reference was made to the positive behaviors of parents and the most encountered behaviors were: “Provides financial support” (M = 4.71) “Provides logistical support (e.g.: Transport)” (M = 4.5), “Makes sacrifices for child’s success” (M = 4.43), “Motivates the child during the encountered challenges” (M = 4.36) and “Stresses the importance of the fieldwork” (M = 4.29).

In part 2 of the question respondents were asked about their perception over the impact of the positive parental behaviors using the following scale: 1 = no impact 2 = Very little impact, 3 = little impact, 4 = much impact, 5 = Very much impact.

Behaviors that are considered to have the most impact were: “Make sacrifices for child success” (M = 4.62), “Provides financial support” (M = 4.54), “Creates an environment conducive to achievement” (M = 4.46), “Has an appropriate behavior when the child plays bad” (M = 4.38) and “Guides properly when the child is confused” (M = 4.38).

Regarding the effectiveness of coach-parent relationship coaches were asked to rank how often they encountered or observed problems / bottlenecks of this collaboration using the following scale: 1 = Never, 2 = almost never, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = all the time.

It was found that the most frequently: “Father undermines the coach by verbal interventions during training” (M = 3.64), “Parent expects results because of high costs involved in practicing tennis” (M = 3.64), “Father fires coach because short-term outcomes” (M = 3.64), “Father does not know anything or know little about tennis” (M = 3.43) and “Child perspective on success in tennis does not coincide with the coaches’ (M = 3.36).

The severity of those problems / bottlenecks that stand in the way of good cooperation were clasificated:

The most serious problems / bottlenecks were considered the following: "Father undermining the coach on the player during train verbal interventions" (M = 4.46), "Parent undermines discipline imposed by the coach" (M = 4.38), "Lack of financial involvement to support child" (M = 4.23), "Father ignores / does not meet coach" (M = 4.15) and "Lack of open and frank communication between parent and coach" (M = 4.15).

In the view of the coaches, the most important parental behaviors on a scale of 1-5 (where 1 = Not important and 5 = extremely much importance) are: "Recognize the importance of long-term goals" (M = 4.64), "Reduces the pressure on child's performance" (M = 4.57) and "Agree to the coach's decisions" (M = 4.57), "Makes the child more responsible" (M = 4.57) and "The coach has confidence in decisions related to the development of the child" (M = 4.5) .

Strategies considered to be the most useful in coach-parent collaboration efficiency have been proposed: "Experienced coaches are mentors for less experienced coaches" (M = 4.57), "Building confidence" (M = 4.5), "To be honest and open" (M = 4.5), "Educating parents regarding negative behaviors" (M = 4.5) and "Define the role and responsibilities of parent" (M = 4.43).

## **Conclusions**

The results show that parents play a critical role in the development of junior tennis players. Moreover, while many parents help their children succeed, coaches believe that many parents significantly interfere with the development of their child, and causes damage to the parent-child relationship. This is not surprising, given that parents do not receive information about how to help their child develop in tennis.

It should be recalled that parents do not interfere with the development of their child's sporting development deliberately. They believe they are doing everything they can in the interest of the child. However, many do not have extensive knowledge and experience in competitive tennis and do not understand what is necessary for sustainable development of the junior tennis player. It is time for parents to be better equipped with knowledge in the field, and this paper provides some necessary information.

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