

July 5, 2012

Mr. Sean Hannity
c/o 77 WABC-AM Radio
2 Penn Plaza – 17th Floor
New York, New York 10121

Dear Mr. Hannity:

Having read the column that you posted on your website on June 26, 2012 (*Sean's analysis on USTA*), I am writing to you in my capacity as the Chair of the USTA national Junior Competition Committee. First let me say how delighted we are that your children are young tennis players, and that you have joined the ranks of tennis parent. Good luck and best wishes.

With your national platform, needless to say, your thoughts have generated much discussion throughout the country amongst junior tennis players, parents, and coaches. In starting, what will be a very long response, let me share with you that I spent a large part of the afternoons of June 26th and June 27th calling your radio show (at 1-800-941-7326 as invited to do) with no success, as the phone continually rang busy. When I was not able to get through by phone, I used your website's "Contact Sean" e-mail link. In it I introduced myself and provided you with my cell phone number as well as e-mail address.

I mention this because in the ideal world I would really prefer to speak with you personally. Having not heard from you or your organization in the last week, and having been contacted by many concerned tennis families over the past week regarding your post, I feel compelled to write. Please know that I would still really enjoy the opportunity to visit in person. Possibly we can do this when I come to New York City in September for the 2012 U.S Open and 2012 USTA Semi-Annual meeting. Or, feel free to call me if you wish to discuss this further.

In organizing my response to your post, I will first address a good number of your basic concerns point-by-point in the order in which they appear in your presentation. Then I will proceed to share a few additional thoughts from my perspective about the new national tournament structure and how it was developed.

- (1) I really appreciate your description of how tennis mirrors life, your intrigue with every aspect of the game, as well as your main goal regarding your children's tennis activities.
- (2) I was thrilled with your thought that someday your children might play tennis in college!
- (3) Please know that the new national tournament structure was not simply approved by the USTA Board of Directors alone as you indicate; the new structure was approved overwhelmingly by the entire Association – the USTA Board of Directors, Past Presidents, Presidential Appointees, and 16 of the 17 USTA Sections. In your world of politics, it was a landslide victory, a "mandate." My guess is that November's upcoming elections will not witness this kind of percentage in any race or consensus regarding any issue.

- (4) As we have indicated in previous descriptions of the new structure, one fundamental belief of the national Junior Competition Committee is that we have *increased* overall opportunities for competitive play throughout the structure and that only the very best players should be competing at the highest levels of national competition (more on this later). A discourse note at this moment: we recognize that reasonable people can agree to disagree without being disagreeable about many parts of this conversation.

The notion/question of how many players should compete at the highest levels of sport competition, the highest level tennis tournaments, is certainly open for serious discussion. Take, for example, the upcoming Olympics. The Olympic singles draws will be comprised of 64 players, not the usual 128 found in Grand Slam® events. Where are the countless tennis blogs complaining about that “opportunities have been reduced?” Who should be able to play in the Olympic singles competition (i.e., the selection process, an issue found in junior tournaments as well)? Only four players from any one country are allowed to compete in the Olympic singles event. Consider the unfortunate circumstance of Feliciano Lopez of Spain. As of this week’s ATP Tour rankings he is ranked #17 in world in singles. That noted he will not be competing at the Olympics in the singles competition. (He will be competing in doubles.) Some may say that this is not fair. But it is the reality. In Spain Lopez is only the country’s fifth best player. The current rankings for higher ranked Spanish players are Nadal = # 2; Ferrer = #5; Almagro = # 11; Verdasco = #16. If you have been following the Olympic tennis selection process you already know that there are a number of other similar stories, like that of Philipp Kohlschreiber, who defeated Rafael Nadal in straight sets in the quarterfinals in Halle as well as reaching the quarterfinals of Wimbledon, who will also be excluded from the men’s draw (but for different reasons than Lopez). Get a grip America. Here are real life lessons for young American junior tennis players!

Taking a larger view of our sport, it should be noted that since America’s “Glory Days,” tennis has become far more international. In pondering why America has had more challenges competing recently remember that in 1988 tennis became an Olympic sport and all of the world’s countries were incentivized to create world class tennis players. Also, the “fall of the Eastern Bloc and Soviet Union” incentivized many smaller and highly motivated countries to focus on tennis.

- (5) Continuing with your concerns regarding “opportunities,” let’s turn to several of your next points. For example, you write:

In the existing schedule, there are between 2,304 and 2,432 opportunities for players to compete against opponents from outside their region. These 2,300+ opportunities are spread across twelve Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 event dates. That is an average of at least 192 opportunities per event date.

You write as if the current c. 2,400 opportunities is some perfect number. Yes, the average of 192 is presently correct. But, once again, not all of these match experiences are competitive. In fact, many are not competitive. Please study the match results of the first two rounds in many of our 192 draw national championships. For everyone

complaining about reduced draw sizes, please explain to me why the first alternate in to this July's Girl's 12's National Clay Court Championship is ranked #888 in the country! There simply might not be the "demand" that you and others claim there to be for some of our largest national championships.

Please also study the number of competitors there are in the national events of other individual youth sports and how they progress to these events (i.e., USA Diving).

(6) You wrote:

If you are as frustrated as I am that American tennis has been on a steady decline, both professionally and at the college level, with more and more colleges giving scholarships to foreign students because American players are falling behind, as well as, the loss of college teams, the loss of high school teams, and the significant loss of tennis courts in major metropolitan areas, then I hope you will join me in urging the immediate reversal of the USTA's "new rules" for juniors competition.

One of the first major fundamental concerns I have with the argument being made by you and others is that you submit that America is not currently as competitive in the world of tennis as you/we would like and then you passionately argue that the U.S. should keep a system that is, obviously, not working as well as it needs to. This makes no sense to me, and it made no sense to the national Junior Competition Committee and ultimately the USTA as the governing body of our sport in America!

This begs a truly fundamental question, "How do tennis players get better?" The answers are in many ways quite simple – hard work and playing highly competitive matches.

What does our current national tournament structure presently do? It actually disincentives competition! In reality it encourages players (actually their coaches and parents) to look on-line in order to find the weakest draws, enter these events, and then go and chase the most points possible so that they can build their national ranking; in playing these weaker events the youngster might not even get competitive matches; the family will have spent lots of money, the national points will have been secured, but the child might well not have improved. This is sad, and unfortunate, and one large reason that the USTA needed to make changes to the current structure.

In considering costs of competition, many people will agree that the costs for competing as national junior tennis player today could range between \$30,000 and \$100,000/year for one child. Imagine families with multiple children. Attending one national (or, even, regional) championship (with one player, one parent, and possibly a coach) can cost a total of c. \$2,300 - \$5,150.

- 1 (or 2) hotel rooms @ \$100/night x 7 = \$700/\$1400
- 2 (or 3) air fares @ \$300/per = \$600/\$900
- Food for 2 (or 3) @ \$50/day/per = \$700/\$1050
- Rental car = c. \$300
- (coaching fee – possibly up to \$1500)

- Such an expense could actually amount to **c. \$1,000/match!!!** And, as referenced before, some of these matches might not even be competitive.

Multiple this by 12 -15 events annually and you can see why many feel that the current national tournament schedule needed a revision. Add clinics, lessons, equipment, stringing, etc. and most people agree that there is real reason for concern for the future of our sport. The challenges were not in making the changes to our current system. The bigger problem would have been for American junior tennis families who would have continued to be burdened with unnecessarily high costs of competition had we not voted to improve the current system!

What should a national tournament structure do? Incentivize hard work and rigorous competition, where winners advance and losers do not. Our committee believes that if you can't win at home, just because you have money to travel you should not be allowed to "purchase" a high ranking. Little League Baseball does not have teams from Florida flying to Maine or Hawaii to collect points to get in to the Little League World Series; teams win locally, and then continue to advance . . . hopefully all the way to Williamsport.

When I accepted the chairmanship of the USTA national Junior Competition Committee along with the accompanying charge from incoming USTA President Jon Vegosen, I contacted many people to seek input and advice. Let me share one response to my inquiries and how feedback like this, as well as similar thoughts from other leading tennis leaders, shaped the thinking of this process. One of the first people I called was American coach Wayne Bryan. Coach Bryan and I share many things in common – a love of music, a love of tennis, a love of learning, and a commitment to do what's right for American young people (all kids including average kids, and not just elite athletes and musicians).

I discussed the charge with him and asked for his best thinking about ways to meet the charge. He offered four important guiding principles. He said:

- (a) "When Bob and Mike were growing up their toughest matches were always getting out of Southern California." I kept Coach Bryan's very insightful statement in mind throughout the process of working on the new structure.
- (b) "A young tennis player should not get in a car to play a tennis match until they can beat everyone at where they can ride a bike; that player should not get in a plane to fly to a tennis match until they can beat everyone to where they can drive in a car."
- (c) "We need to find ways to heighten the importance of doubles"; and,
- (d) "We need to heighten the importance of team events in ways that connect juniors to the joys of college tennis."

I know that our proposal utilized all of these astute suggestions. One of the major challenges that this process has posed has been that while we conferred closely with many leading experts like Coach Bryan, even those consulted have expressed some disagreement with parts of the new structure. While Coach Bryan has, in fact, expressed some such disagreement publicly, we are confident that the new structure supports much

of what he espouses. For example, we have driven play back to the Sections. Starting in 2014, we should no longer have the situation that Coach Bryan described to me where today the Southern California sectionals are missing many/most of the best young players from So Cal. We have reduced unnecessary travel, and corresponding costs. Coach Bryan confirmed that he is not for kids spending lots of time and money flying around the country chasing points, and neither are we. Furthermore, we have made the 14s and 16s national doubles event a Gold Ball event. Using Coach Bryan's principle of side door motivation from his book *Raising Your Child to Be a Champion in Athletics, Arts, and Academics*, we are working to place these events at a summer U.S. Open Series Pro location. As for teams, we have added a 14s Intersectional event as well as two levels of national Team Championships in December modeled after the NCAAs. (Those December Team Championships will intersect 14s, 16s, and 18s on the same team in what should be very exciting high level competition.)

What was the American national junior tournament schedule like when American professional rankings were "at our best"? It was much like what we are returning to! The current "Optimum Schedule" was approved in 1999. Please consider the last great American "cluster" of men who made it into top 100 (e.g., Andy Roddick; Mardy Fish; Robbie Ginepri, Amer Delic, Alex Bogomolov, Rajeev Ram, James Blake, Michael Russell, etc.). They played under a system that promoted "earned advancement."

Many of our current junior tennis families might not know or remember that Jim Courier flew back from the French Open Juniors to play the Florida Closed in order to qualify for Kalamazoo (U.S. Hard Court Championship). Martin Blackman had to return to the Eastern Section from the Bollettieri Academy (where he was training with Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras, Courier, and David Wheaton) six times in a year in order to qualify for Kalamazoo (note: Martin Blackman won Kalamazoo in the 16's). The message is that Jim Courier, Martin Blackman, Andy Roddick, Mardy Fish, and the Bryan Brothers had to compete in and win in their Sections in order to move on to national competition! The system worked then, and it will again!

(7) Next you wrote:

USTA's 2010 schedule allowed juniors the opportunity to play against a wider variety of playing styles and gave players greater flexibility in scheduling their national play. In the new schedule, however, if a player misses the July-August competitive period, he or she is basically going to be eliminated from national ranking contention for that year.

This is one issue that we could spend a lot of time on, but I won't at this point. Be clear, the new system will certain still have many opportunities to play a wide variety of players. And, more importantly, this new schedule enables each player and family to choose exactly the schedule that they want to play!! FYI, the current system requires all players to travel in order to gain points and be competitive on the national rankings list. In the new schedule, for example, a player can chose, for example, to only play in So Cal and Florida until the National Championships, as players will qualify for the national championships through their Sections – and then go to Kalamazoo (Boys) or San Diego (Girls), win it, and end up at the U.S. Open. Other families might choose to travel to

regional events and National Selection Tournaments at which they can play against other players and develop their game in a wider arena. The new system has more choices, not less. One choice that many people are not speaking about is not having to travel as much. As to the second argument, in this system, like any, players have to win (and win in high places) to actually become highly ranked. In most sports that I know of, players have to actually be at the national championships to win national championship, and be declared the national champion. Not everyone is entitled to have a high national ranking. As an aside, not all youth sports have multiple national championships.

(8) Next you wrote:

*This slashing of the number of competitive opportunities is troubling. But there is more: The USTA will be re-instituting the “Good Birthday/Bad Birthday” dilemma for national level juniors. A player born in July will always be the youngest player in the national rankings and national tournaments. Without full-sized national championships at times other than the July-August window, the USTA is retreating to the problems associated with “birth year” age control dates. Beginning in 2014, a September birthday will be treasured, while players born in July and August will pick another sport. **Has anybody at the USTA ever read the book *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell?***

Yes, I’ve read *Outliers*. I have also read *The Talent Code*, *Talent is Overrated*, and many other books regarding the subject of talent development. I have attached my reading list for your reading pleasure. With my Ph.D., I have spent my career in the “talent development business.” While, in full disclosure, it has been musical development (I am a music professor and orchestra conductor by vocation), my son did rise through the junior ranks to become a Top 20 nationally ranked junior tennis player.

Regarding the current birthday argument, once again, if the current system has been working so well why have you and others been bemoaning the decline of American tennis? FYI, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) uses a birth year system, as do most other national tennis federations. The “pre-optimum” USTA schedule also used birth years. Our USTA national coaches group players in birth years. Some highly respected developmental coaches like Tom Walker have suggested to me that the national USTA Junior Competition Committee should consider officially returning to the year of birth designation, given the new structure. Other experts, and families, have suggested that they want to keep the month of birth. Clearly this is an important issue that will require continuing study. What you and others need to know is that the committee did address this issue. Meeting our charge was and continues to be a complex calculus.

(9) Continuing, you wrote:

It is difficult to justify corraling all players within their regions – and then only allowing the very best players in the nation the opportunity to compete against out-of-region opponents. Reducing out-of-region playing opportunities by at least 75 percent makes no sense from a developmental standpoint, to say nothing of how it will affect the players motivationally. All players should have the chance to be exposed to as many different opponents as possible within a framework that meets their personal schedule, and not be limited to the very rigid July-August time frame.

Respectfully, it is not at all difficult to make such a justification. Refer back to Coach Bryan – the progression equals bike, car, plane! In college varsity tennis, players progress from their locales and conferences to ITA regions, and then to ITA national events; again, only the best progress.

Again, please look at the progression of other youth sports.

You have no basis in factual research data that confirms that the current regional play is actually improving player development any more markedly than young players staying at home and competing against older players, adults, and collegiate players. Again, reasonable people can agree to disagree, but our committee does not believe that it is the responsibility of the national governing body to create a competitive schedule that meets everyone's "personal schedule."

Furthermore, we believe that the schedule is still well balanced throughout the entire calendar. Many might remember that one of our early committee goals was actually to shrink the number of events in the July/August time block. In fact, we had originally moved the National Clay Court Championships to the Memorial Day Weekend. We only returned them to July after the clear consensus within the USTA as an Association and the general tennis community is that everyone wanted them to remain in July! Our committee listened.

For those looking at the professional calendar, it's pretty clear that the Grand Slams® (and U.S. Open Series) are fairly compressed – from May through September (with the Aussie Open in January similar to our national team championship, which is planned for December).

(10) You wrote

There is no justification to reduce the number of competitive opportunities or to require regionalized play just to reduce travel for players and avoid missing school. Because of the reduction in the number of event dates, players will have FEWER choices to make about having to travel and when to play, regardless of how it affects their personal schedules. In fact, reducing the number of national event dates and sites will force players to travel to wherever the tournament is being held! Believing that it will be cheaper for a player to travel to one of four tournament sites across the U.S. would somehow be cheaper than traveling to one of eight sites defies all logic. While some players will by necessity be forced to stay close to home in regional play, those who are admitted to the reduced number of national events being offered will by necessity have to travel farther!

There are plenty of justifications, even if you don't like them. The first reality is that there will simply be fewer weeks on the national schedule beginning in 2014, and thus fewer needs to travel. Again, going forward no one will have to travel unless they choose to do so. In the current system you have to travel quite a bit.

Moving from eight regions to four will insure that the best players are competing against each other – a primary goal! With the old eight regions, there were times when players were entering 16 tournaments on-line for a given weekend (all eight regions in two age

divisions). This was crazy – for families and tournaments directors. Going forward, players will know which region they advance to, and they will be certain that the players at the event will all be good. And, the players who don't get in to those regional events will have other lower level events in which to play. Again, the concept is that players will be competing at their appropriate level and gaining productive competitive experience. The theory is that those who win the lower level events will move up going forward and those who lose all of their matches at higher levels will move down . . . as it should be.

- (11) You wrote: *The result is this: Strong players will have to travel farther at greater costs.*

There is no basis in fact for such a conclusion. Our committee even compared air flight costs across various regional scenarios. We are confident that we have come to the most cost effective system possible.

- (12) I must confess that the next statement might actually be the assertion with which I am the most amazed. You actually wrote:

Lower ranked players will not get to play national events at all and, in all likelihood, will understandably lose interest in pursuing the game.

Why should low ranked players even get to play at national events?! Every youngster is not entitled to be a nationally ranked player! I love tennis and I am not in the Wimbledon draw this week. Not every college graduate can go to medical school. Mr. Hannity, I am amazed that you and others believe that all players are entitled to compete on the national stage. Not every American gets their own nationally syndicated TV and/or radio show.

Politically speaking, if you will permit me such a reference, since you started your column professing your passion for politics . . . what the national Junior Competition Committee proposed, and the USTA adopted, you might actually consider very “Republican.” We created equal access, and equal opportunity, but no entitlement. Players will have to earn their way. Winners advance. This is actually very “American,” a very “bi-partisan” approach . . . to be cheered by tennis playing Democrats and Republicans alike.

Not everyone is “entitled” to play nationally, whether you have the financial resources or not.

As for your assertion that those not competing nationally will “understandably lose interest in pursuing the game,” (a preposterous assumption as far as I am concerned from both an educational and parental perspective), I would respectfully ask whether you have read *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. In it, the author suggests, in addressing just your scenario, that another (in my words, “a better, and more likely”), course of action for passionate young players is that they will work harder so that they reach their goal of national play. This is precisely what my son did,

countless others young American have done throughout our country's illustrious history . . . and what I hope that your children will do.

The new system encourages, and promotes, and rewards hard work and success. Not only is this an American value, but one that will return America to world tennis prominence once again!

(13) I will address each of the following, as you continued:

It is nearly impossible, especially when you consider their rationale in light of the proposed changes, to reconcile how the USTA's "ends" justifies its "means." In fact, retaining the current level of national competitive opportunities will hurt no one. Restricting opportunities, whether in numbers of players admitted, or by geographical location, or calendar date, will hurt every player, and specifically:

Once again, the current system is not working as it needs to; to keep it will keep America on its current downward path, a trajectory which none of us wants.

Those players who are marginally ranked because of birth date or the radical skewing of the new point tables.

There will be a new points table for 2014, which will be researched-based and data-driven.

The message to players must be – work hard, compete hard, get better; you will win more, and move up the rankings and through the system. Top developmental coaches like Mark Bey, Rick Meyers, Jack Sharpe, and Tom Walker will help their players create developmental plans, and progress through the system with the appropriate personally conceived tournament schedules. All junior players should expect their coaches to help them create such plans and schedules!

Those players who are members of smaller sections and have to play the same opponents tournament after tournament.

Personally I live in a small Section – the USTA Southwest. That said, let me submit that playing USTA Sectional events is not the only option for junior players. They can and should play adults and enter adult tournaments; they should play collegiate players, and compete in USTA *Campus Showdowns*. They can compete in ITA/USTA Summer Circuits, enter Pro Circuit qualifiers, play older kids, etc., etc., etc.

This argument regarding small sections is a bogus, straw man argument. My son, who I have referenced before (Geoff Russell – who, by way of full disclosure, is now the USTA national manager for Player ID and Development and responsible for the administration of the USTA Regional Training Centers) never travelled competitively outside of our "small" Section as a singles player until the second year of his 16's. He did play summer team events at an earlier age. He did all the things I referenced above to build his game. He and Colin O'Grady played in sanctioned USTA matches and Arizona state high school matches over thirty times throughout their junior careers – and they both got better

and better and better. They also played practice matches against each other during the week! Both went on to outstanding collegiate varsity careers.

When I discussed the advantage that a Section like Southern Cal has with my friend, Wimbledon Mixed Doubles Champion, John Austin, he always replied, “While Southern Cal had lots of great players, I never had to leave the Kramer Club to get better. It’s about kids *butting heads*.” That’s what Agassi, Courier, Sampras, Wheaton and Blackman did at Bollettieri’s. This is the culture of competition and spirit that we are trying to re-create and re-kindle all across America.

And let me say, that this entire new tournament structure may really just be an intermediate step to an even larger, grander and wider vision for American player development. Be on the lookout for level-based local events and “Metropolitan Training Co-ops.”

The USTA is trying to create new and innovative options for all players to add to the existing offerings.

Players whose development is stunted by a lack of exposure to a variety of playing experiences, styles and weather conditions.

The new system has plenty of different “playing experiences,” including re-introducing indoor play back to the national schedule.

Players who will never reap the benefits of being exposed to the top players in the U.S.

This concept of “exposure” is a non-starter as far as I am concerned. You earn your way to play the top players! Again, I would love “exposure” to Roger Federer in a competitive event, as would many lower level pros. Players have to earn their way to compete against Roger Federer and other top players. The logic is flawed that believes that a “lower ranked” junior is “entitled” to play the No. 1 ranked player, or a Top Ten player, in their age group at a 192 national championship because “I paid a lot of money to accumulate my national points” by flying around the country to insure that I am top 200. If you disagree with my/our position so be it. But, in the pros, those in the “futures” have to win before they compete in the “challengers,” and then win again in the “challengers” before gaining access to the WTA and ATP Tours.

Players who get hurt and miss the national tournament season, which is in July and August.

Sadly, players get hurt all of the time. Good players will reclaim their form, ranking, and entrance to events. If you want another real life lesson, consider Sam Querry. Injured, and recovering from elbow surgery, Sam chose not to take a protected ranking. Instead, his coach wanted Sam to get appropriate level matches under his belt. A former top 20 player was back playing “challengers.” He has now worked his way back up to the Top 50, and just competed brilliantly in the second longest match in Wimbledon history.

As an aside, injuries are one reason why tournaments have a limited number of wildcards.

Players who are motivated by the invisible badge they get for playing in a "national" event.

I am sure, by now, that you know where I stand on this. There are no “invisible badges.” There are real accomplishments. Not everyone deserves a trophy. Everyone at the national events will know that they deserve to be there by way of truly earning their spot. And, once all top competitors get there, the competition will be fierce. The matches will be intense. And, those not there will be having tough competition at their own event, working hard at their appropriate competitive level to gain entrance to the next national event.

(14) Moving toward the end of your remarks, you opined that

Because the USTA owns the U.S. Open, which purportedly generates over \$250 million gross revenue annually, it does not have to share its authority over youth competition as does Little League Baseball or Pop Warner Football within their sports. Ideally, I would prefer free market competition, but with a \$100 million dollar net annual advantage, the likelihood of this is remote. Therefore, since the USTA occupies this unique "bureaucratic" position in the sport, changes must come from within.

While you state that you “would prefer free market competition” it seems except that you, and others, want individual entitlement.

Regarding your last statement, as one who is a devoted USTA volunteer I will suggest that in the world we live in some changes are, in fact, coming from outside of the USTA, and that the USTA has begun to embrace these exciting new ideas. One big idea is the concept of using ratings to encourage local level-based play. Be on the lookout for potentially transformational innovations in this regard!

(15) Regarding governance you commented:

Fortunately, the USTA is governed by its 17 volunteer sections. It is through these sections that meaningful changes must take place in regard to the direction of youth tennis, specifically with this issue of the reduction of national level competition for players ranked below the top 30 or so in the U.S.

In fact, the largest sectional association, USTA Southern, voted against the proposal. This section's officials painstakingly analyzed it and were unwaveringly against it. They came to understand how detrimental this really is to junior tennis. Southern section officials voted against it, despite the possible political consequences from USTA higher-ups

Mr. Hannity, once again let me point out that 16 of the 17 Sections voted for this proposal, including your Eastern Section. I would respectfully submit that the 16 Sections that voted overwhelmingly in favor of the proposal also “painstakingly analyzed it.” This project has probably been one of the most closely vetted initiatives in recent USTA history. In the Sectional vote it was 16-1. In your world of politics, or any world, that is a landslide victory! Your implication that all of these intelligent, passionate American tennis supporters voted for something that they, in your words “*know will be detrimental to the sport of tennis*” is just wrong, as is your premise.

Once again, if the current system is so good, why are you and others bemoaning the U.S. position in the tennis world?!

In the next paragraph you describe how not overturning the recent vote “could affect a whole generation of U.S. tennis players.” At this point I will agree, but suggest a different outcome. As the new system will be implemented in 2014, the next generation of young American junior tennis players will be far better off. We will have many more and better players. And, personally I hope that your children will be two of them.

You speak of “killing the future of the sport.” If the current state of American tennis is what you (and others) want to continue, then let me respectfully submit that your view of a successful future is markedly different than ours. I am very confident that in ten years our sport and American rankings will be in a much better place.

(16) At the end of your post you state:

When you talk to juniors, coaches, tournament directors, umpires, and parents at junior tournaments, which I do almost every weekend, almost all are against these changes. It is clear that if any junior tennis players, coaches, tournament directors, and parents were consulted, the sample must have been very small.

A few thoughts: first, many people simply do not like change; second, it is not surprising that many in the current system (who are benefitting from the current system) want to keep the current system; third, many current players and parents (and even coaches) have not undertaken the study that the USTA recently completed; and, finally, it is probably true that in spite of our initial efforts the USTA has not done a good enough job telling our story (which is one of the reasons for this very long response).

The study process lasted over 18 months. Much discussion and hard work took place, always focusing on the vision and charge (less costly; miss less school; create more and better American juniors). The national Junior Competition Committee (JCC) took its job very seriously, and was faithful to the charge. The process was thorough, open, inclusive, and transparent. In addition to JCC meetings at USTA meetings there were outside working meetings for the JCC. We made multiple requests of the 17 USTA sections – their Junior Competition Committees and Coaches Commissions. The USTA is a representative-based Association and we worked through the appropriate levels of the Association. Each of the 17 Sectional Junior Competition Committees were given multiple opportunities to provide input into the structure, as well as to review multiple drafts of the proposal; the same opportunity was provided to all 17 Sectional Coaching Commissions, and to the Section leadership as well.

The Junior Competition Committee referenced surveys that were conducted by previous national Junior Comp committees (i.e., Player Development Advisory Group and Junior Competition Advisory Team). Members of the Junior Competition Committee studied other youth sports (including USA Diving, the American Junior Golf Association,

gymnastics, and chess). We studied other tennis federations (including Tennis Europe and Tennis Australia).

We consulted renowned developmental experts, including (but not limited to) Dr. K. Anders Ericsson (the “father of deliberate practice”) and Dr. Robert Pangrazi (one of the world’s leading authorities regarding youth sports pedagogy).

We were in constant communication with General Manager of USTA Player Development, Patrick McEnroe, and his team.

I personally spoke at the May 2011 General Membership Meeting of the Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA), attended by hundreds of collegiate varsity coaches at that year’s NCAA Division I Men’s and Women’s Tennis Championships. These experts were invited to offer their suggestions, which many did. Their collective No. 1 message and priority was “please develop a structure that will make our juniors *tougher*.” While in Palo Alto in 2011, I also met with legendary coach Dick Gould (coach of 17 NCAA Team Championships), who offered his recommendations.

The national Junior Competition Committee reviewed more than 20 informal drafts of the proposal; three formal drafts were reviewed by the Association; multiple presentations were made to the Association leadership (USTA Board, Section Presidents, Section Delegates, and Section Executive Directors), who embarked on multiple open discussions.

There were meetings and calls with the 17 Section Player Development managers.

There were calls and meetings with Sectional Junior Competition Committees (including Patrick McEnroe and I speaking with the Eastern Section’s Junior Competition Committee).

I returned to the 2012 ITA General Membership meeting at this year’s NCAA Championships in Athens Georgia. The assembled coaches collectively applauded and voiced great support of the new structure. Peter Smith (four-time NCAA Championship coach and father of junior players) has expressed his support of the new structure.

Those who say there was not consultation are just plain wrong, or they chose not to be involved, or they do not like that their personal views were not included in total.

(17) Sean, if I may call you by your first name, the end of your post concludes by stating:

In closing I want you to think back to the old USTA Level 3 National events that were steeped with tradition – Copper Bowl, Gator Bowl, Peach State, St. Louis Gateway, etc.

I don’t think that your children are old enough to have played the old Copper Bowl or St. Louis Gateway. I don’t know whether you played any of those events. This aside, I can assure you that our committee feels as though we have been respectful of much of our

sport's past grand tradition. We also believe that we have looked to the future and are confident that we will be building some new events which in 20 – 30 years will be thought of with the same reverence.

We were committed to maintain the values of the past while planning for the future. Most leading businesses recognize that change is hard, but necessary. Organizations need not only ask, "Where have we been?" and "Where are we now?" but also, "Where are we going?" and "How best shall we get there?" We tried, like many other business leaders, to see what things might/should look like in two – five – ten years.

I can assure you that we were looking out for what we believe is in the best interest of your children's tennis future. I am convinced that we needed to make these changes and that the new system beginning in 2014 will be much more effective and efficient and affordable than the current structure.

Having responded to your particular post, please allow me to share a few more thoughts in order that you and others might more fully understand some of the thinking that permeated the process that resulted in the new tournament structure.

First I want to acknowledge, thank, and congratulate the hard-working national USTA Junior Competition Committee. This group is comprised of top national developmental coaches (e.g., Mark Bey who coached two junior players who were just seeded in the top ten of the recent NCAA Division I Men's and Women's Tennis Championships), Chairs of Sectional Junior Comp committee and Sectional Coaches Commissions, coaches who themselves played in all four Grand Slams® and have taught players of all ages and abilities for over 30 years, former junior players and former college players (some who have gone on to become successful business executives and community leaders), top national tournament directors, one of the most brilliant, forward-thinking college coaches in America (Harvard Men's Tennis Coach Dave Fish), tennis parents (of current and past junior players), directors of Parks and Recreation Departments, USPTA and PTR professionals, a highly experienced Sectional Player Development staff leader, a revered USTA Section Executive Director, and the long-standing and highly committed national Director of Junior Competition Lew Brewer. 13 of the 17 Sections were represented, including Bob Ingersole from the Eastern Section and two members from the Southern Section.

People can say whatever they want about the process or new structure, but one thing that I will not tolerate is anyone offering anything but the highest praise for the efforts of this astonishing team of incredible individuals. As this process has unfolded I have become fond of quoting the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan who once remarked that, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts."

The fact of the matter is that our committee was given an important charge and worked diligently to meet that charge. The USTA as an Association, the American governing body of our sport, overwhelmingly approved the new structure after an extensive study.

What do we want junior tennis players, parents and coaches to know? We want our juniors to love the game! We want our juniors to focus on developing their games, getting better each and every day – knowing that appropriate wins and ranking will come with this effort. Love to compete (win or lose). Champions love to compete. Know that starting in 2014 you will no longer be able to avoid competition if you want a high ranking. You will progress from playing (and winning) locally to a district level, possibly your State, your Section, your Region, and finally nationally. Only the best players will compete nationally. There is no entitlement to play nationally.

Brent Frueh, an incredible member of our committee (a top tennis pro in Minnesota as well as USTA Northern Section President and Delegate) has a son who now plays varsity tennis for the University of Minnesota. He has emphatically stated that “the new system would have made his son a much better player and saved his family tens of thousands of dollars!”

Structures cannot develop champions, but structures can create the cultures that create champions. This new structure will create the culture that can develop more great players. The USTA is changing the paradigm of the culture for junior competition, with the hope of transforming the landscape of American tennis.

While some, or, even many, might or don't like the changes, we are confident that those young players entering 10's and 12's competition will not know any other system. This will be *their* system, and they will thrive in their new system. They will perform better if those coaching them and parenting them are supportive of the system. We ask for your support, for the sake of your children and American tennis!

As you educate your children, tell them that the new schedule and structure:

- Is based on a competitive philosophy that “facilitates COMPETITIVE QUALITY MATCHES” and tries to insure that players “must excel at each level before progressing; they cannot really skip steps.”
- Reduces expenses and the number of school days missed!
- Couples training with top competition.
- Focuses more attention on player development:
 - Introduces competition and training across ages divisions
 - Minimizes national travel through the 12's
 - Leaves spaces in various parts of the national schedule free for players to build/develop their games!
- Provides a well-defined competitive pathway with a logical merit-based progression, aspiring to the spirit of earned advancement – not “entitlement”:
 - “I earned my way to the regionals. I earned my way to the nationals.”
 - Promotes more high competitive play at local and Sectional level.

- Will provides winners with real incentives (i.e., wildcards in to appropriate professional events); these are still to be formalized.
- Re-introduces indoor play on the national competition calendar.
- Revitalizes the importance of even more team play. (Note: “99% of our juniors go to college” and do not go on to play professional tennis; in college they will play on teams.)
- Introduces cross-age play during selected team events.
- Will now vary somewhat by age and concept:
 - Younger players will be encouraged to focus on more local play and focus more on their development.
 - Minimizes national travel through the 12’s.
 - More advanced older players not only compete against each other but also will train with each other.
 - A major premises is to save money – less travel; travel shorter distances; shorter tournaments and closer to home; fewer nights in hotels.
- The new structure creates a system that is about developmental equity and advancement (i.e., getting players of equal ability “butting heads,” playing “high quality competitive matches,” on a regular basis while accounting for opportunities to “move up”).
- The new structure attempts to guide the players to play in the proper events – progressing logically from local and district play, to Sectional play, then appropriate Regional play, and finally National competition; in doing so, reducing costs (and improving competitive play, and, thus, development).
- Creates a structure whereby players learn to beat their own peers and excel at a level before moving up (“earned advancement”).
- Will truly will save costs and allow for fewer school days missed.
- Will improve the validity of the national Points Per Round ranking system.
- Provides that winning a Sectional Championship will insure a spot in the National Hard Court Championship (again, elevating the importance of Sectional play and the Sectional Championship).
- Heighten the importance of team play and training.
- Introduces an innovative “progressive tournament” structure (i.e., the “Grand Masters”).

- Introduces a “Strength of Section” component to the structure.

- Introduces two new educational programs which support the new culture:
 - USTA National Scholastic Junior Scholar-Athlete Award program.
 - *Race to the Top* motivational match play program.

And, finally while all of this has been going on, the USTA has been studying how ratings may, over time, enable training and local tournaments to be level-based and not always be all about age (or, even, gender).

Thanks for reading! As I have throughout this process, I stand ready to discuss the work of the national USTA Junior Competition Committee with anyone and everyone. Mr. Hannity, once again let me say that I would be delighted if we could speak together by phone and/or get together in NYC this coming September. As Patrick McEnroe lives in New York City, I believe that he is planning to contact you next week when he returns from Wimbledon in order to also share his thoughts with you personally. And, good luck to you and your family as your tennis journey continues.

Cheers,



Timothy Russell, Ph.D.
Chair, national USTA Junior Competition Committee

c: Jon Vegosen, USTA Chairman of the Board and President; Gordon Smith, Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer; Patrick McEnroe, General Manager, USTA Player Development