



# Junior Tennis Parent-Player Survey

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## INTRODUCTION

- In a previous study, as part of this line of research, it was discovered that parents considered tennis to be a family activity; however, they had a few major concerns, among them being pressure placed on their children to achieve ranking and recognition.
- Junior tennis was referred to as a "pressure cooker" for the players. Additionally, parents wanted to know what other families were doing and if they shared similar points of view.
- Most importantly, parents were asking for a venue to voice their opinions. They wanted advice on how to relieve pressure, how to deal with costs, and what can be done to improve the tennis experience for their children.
- This project was a response to these concerns and parental needs, which explored the following issues:
  - The extent of pressure put on players and the source of the pressure
  - The benefits and sacrifices to play competitive tennis
  - What specifically were the positive and negative aspects of junior tennis for players and their parents
  - The effect of tennis, both positive and negative, financially and emotionally, for players and parents

## PURPOSE

- The purpose of the project was to tap the concerns, issues, and attitudes of the players and parents involved in competitive junior tennis.

## SAMPLE

- To gather this information, a survey was sent out by direct mail to over 1,000 of the US's ranked junior tennis players in January of 1998.

**YEAR PERFORMED 1999**

## METHOD

- Responses collected from the direct mailing were surveys from 496 players and 476 parents.
- Of the players, 57% were boys and 43% were girls, with 25% of all players competing in the 14s division, 38% playing in the 16s division, and 37% playing in the 18s division.
- Of the 467 parents, 72% were players themselves, with 97% reporting being moderately to extremely involved in their child's tennis and 40% spending over 20 hours a week on their child's tennis activities.

## RESULTS

### Player Profile

- Players report that the three main positive aspects of tennis are it gives them self-confidence, teaches them how to handle pressure, and teaches them how to focus.
- When asked to choose the number one choice of what players like best about tennis, 68% reported they liked the challenge of competition.
- When asked to choose what players dislike most about junior tennis, 40% disliked poor sportsmanship from other players, 32% disliked the pressure to win, and 19% disliked other players' parents.
- 75% of the players feel they make personal sacrifices to play tennis, with 19% reporting they lacked a "normal" teenage life.
- Despite the sacrifices, 97% of the players believe that junior tennis is a worthwhile activity.

### Parent Profile

- The number one item that parents liked most about junior tennis is the fact that they enjoyed the competition among the players. Parents also reported that tennis teaches their children how to handle victories and defeat (25%) and how to handle pressure (21%).
- Parents chose various answers for why they dislike junior tennis including pressure to win (38%), lack of sportsmanship among players (31%), and less time for school work (26%).
- Parents report that the primary benefit they personally receive from involvement in their child's tennis is knowing that their child benefits from the experience (62%), and that it creates a closer relationship with their child (39%).

## RESULTS (cont.)

### Tennis and the Family

- Despite players and parents reporting that tennis causes some minor problems in their households, 99% of parents and 98% of players report that tennis is a worthwhile and fulfilling experience as a family.
- Both parents and players agree that junior tennis creates a closer family relationship and consider it to be a positive experience.

Cost of Tennis

83% of parents spent over \$10,000/year (in 1998) on tennis with 36% spending over \$20,000/year. Parents, regardless of income, report that tennis is "outrageously expensive" with 75% mentioning it is a financial hardship on the family.

### Pressure on Players

- Parents are highly concerned about the pressure on their children to perform. 68% of parents report that they "never" or "rarely" put pressure on their children because of their financial or emotional involvement. 32% report they "sometimes" put pressure on their children.
- Players agree with parents in that 85% of players feel their parents put "none" or "a little" pressure on them to play. 5% report parents place "a great deal" and 10% "often" place pressure on them to play.
- On the contrary, an overwhelming 97% of players report they place pressure on themselves to win.

### Top 10 vs. Other Players

- A key distinction among the parents is that top 10 parents have clear, high aspirations for their children when they initially become involved in tennis. They also realize more than other parents (72% vs. 59%) when they first became involved in junior tennis the amount of time effort competitive tennis takes.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- To help make junior tennis an enjoyable and meaningful experience for your players, be sure to draw their attention to the aspects of participation that were cited as being the most positive for the players in this study.
  - More specifically, make sure that your instruction includes the development of your players' self-confidence (e.g., positive feedback, encouragement, providing opportunity for success in practice and competition), instruction on ways players can best handle pressure (e.g., simulating competitive situations in practice, keeping winning in perspective, defining and having plans to combat obstacles), and focusing strategies, (e.g., centered breathing and strategies for dealing with distractions such as other players' and players' parents' poor sportsmanship).
- Also, try to help your players' view competitions as exciting challenges and opportunities for success instead of pressure filled opportunities for failure.
- Try to help your players' put the sacrifices they make for tennis into perspective. Discuss the types of dedication and commitment needed for success, but also make sure that players are able to balance tennis with other aspects of life. Failure to do so could lead to burnout and players' dropping out of tennis altogether.
- Tennis parents take pride in and enjoy being involved in their child's tennis career.
  - Allow for parent involvement that does not interfere with your coaching practices or decisions or the players' enjoyment of the sport.
  - Establishing open communication with players' parents will help create these balanced relationships as well as make it easier to adjust parental involvement if necessary.

## CONCLUSION

- The tennis system is an area where pressure is evolving. The cost of tennis, as well as few major national tennis tournaments place an unusual amount of pressure on players to achieve rankings. Further, recognition from the USTA and scholarships are dependant upon the ranking system.
- Parents need to help your players' place these demands in perspective and make sure much of their focus is on skill development and fun.