

# Evaluation of the potential of the 'introduction to tennis' landscape in Brazil

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## ABSTRACT

The introduction to tennis is an extremely important in the development of children and young people. Actions at this stage can determine whether a child continues in the sport or not. A job well done can, in addition to perhaps developing high-performance players, also determine the continuity of beginner level children in more recreational activity.

**Key words:** tennis, sport initiation, Tennis10s

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## INTRODUCTION

Just over 10 years ago the ITF launched the Play and Stay campaign. The main goal of this action was to promote tennis around the world, increasing participation and the retention rate. Within the campaign itself, working with children of up to 10 years of age – which later came to be known as Tennis10s – became the best-known element. The proposal of Red, Orange and Green stages, as well as equipment modifications for different age groups, was widely disseminated, and key messages such as "tennis is fun", "tennis is easy", "tennis competition is fun", "tennis is healthy" and "tennis is a sport for all" began to reach coaches (Buszard et al., 2018).

Given the evidence that a positive experience when being introduced to a new sport can positively influence sports participation, or even personal development through the development of life skills, it seems fundamental to get to know the reality of the situation in one's own nation, in this case Brazil, in order to motivate future proposals, research, tutor training and other interventions in the coaching field (Coté et al., 2014). To this end, this article seeks to describe the potential of the introduction to tennis structure in Brazil, as pointed out by the professionals responsible for the introductory programmes directed at children.

## METHODS

This research, which is of qualitative character (Sparkes and Smith, 2014), sought to study the perceptions of tennis coordinators responsible for introductory tennis programmes.

For this, 14 coordinators from clubs traditionally recognised in the area of grassroots or introductory tennis, as nominated by the Brazilian Tennis Confederation, were interviewed.



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Coordinators	Categories
(S1; S2; S3; S6; S11; S12)	Use of adapted materials and the Tennis 10s program
(S1; S4; S5; S6)	Training of national coaches
(S1; S2; S9)	Greater access to information

Figure 1. Categories of analysis.

In order to analyse the results, a "thematic analysis" (Sparkes and Smith, 2014), which coded the interview responses into similar themes, was used so the results could be presented and discussed. The items cited by at least three coordinators have been included for discussion. Three categories emerged from the analysis, as seen in figure 1.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The use of modified equipment and ideas central to the Tennis10s programme are highlighted as major points in the tennis coordinators' interview responses.

[...] I think that the big change in recent years was the use of adapted material. It's something that came little by little, but with a lot of resistance in traditional clubs like ours. (S12 - 13'20")

[...] I think that we've come a long way, [for instance] in the use of the different stages: the red stage, the orange stage, the green ball, and then the move to the big court. There are a lot of people using this. This is good; it's a positive point. (S11 - 12'30").

Despite the limited number of studies investigating the impact of the use of modified equipment on the acquisition/development of technical and tactical fundamentals related to the sport, the results so far give evidence towards the positive effects of modified equipment, promoting faster learning and an adoption of technical and tactical patterns that are more advanced and representative of the game to be played in the future (Buszardet et al., 2016).

In addition to the use of adapted materials, the use of different teaching progressions between stages and different methodological adaptations, such as the game-based approach, the understanding of tactical aspects and the contextualization of technical teaching, were other elements of the Tennis10s programme mentioned by the coordinators. The fact that the central ideas of the Tennis10s programme were present in the coordinators responses is a positive point and one that signals towards the adoption of minimum criteria that characterises the grassroots or introductory sports landscape in Brazil, as well as the establishment of national guidelines on which the first stages of the programme can be based.



The pedagogical principles present in Tennis10s are aligned with the contemporary proposals of teaching sports games, such as Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) (Cortela et al., 2012; Thorpe, Bunker, & Almond, 1986), for example, and their variations (Harvey & Jarrett, 2013). These act as a general model, capable of serving as the central axis for the "standardization" of the teaching modality in the country.

The second key point highlighted in the responses of the coordinators concerns the training of coaches involved in the process:

[...] I think the training of the professionals who are working in this area is a lot more developed now than it was five or ten years ago. This element within professional training is a very positive point because today you get a teacher who takes care of that [grassroots tennis] area, who takes care of the introductory tennis programme at a club. He/she is focused on it and very good at it. We never used to have that. (S1 - 18'30").

In fact, learning opportunities in formal and non-formal contexts have increased over the past two decades. In the formal context, the requirement of having initial training in Physical Education to act as a tennis coach in Brazil (a requirement since 1998) has had an impact on the number of graduated professionals, causing a change in the profile of the coaches who work within the area (Cortela et al., 2013) and a change in the self-perception of competence related to the knowledge and skills required for professional performance (Cortela et al., 2017).

In the non-formal context, the learning opportunities are associated with the operations of the Coaches Education department of the Brazilian Tennis Confederation (CBT). Currently, the program offered by the CBT involves more than 300 hours of training, ranging from introductory tennis to high performance, with continued training being more frequent among Brazilian coaches (Cortela, et al., 2013).

The third point considered by the coordinators was the greater ease in accessing information. According to the coordinators, the access to studies, and particularly to the internet, has widened the range of information available to them and reduced the time in which they can get up to speed with the professionals in the job:

[...] the other key point is that the internet, with YouTube, is enabling everyone to see what is being done elsewhere. And you can, depending on your interest, put such things into practice. I think that this is a key point. (S2 - 8'04").

Using the internet to find supporting materials is one of the main sources of informal learning used by coaches. When searching for information on the internet, trainers often look for solutions to problems they encounter in daily professional practice, which supports a meaningful learning process (Walker et al., 2018)

In the specific case of Brazilian coaches, the internet has not only reduced the time gap, but also the accessibility gap since it is less costly to access information. Platforms such as Tennis iCoach allow national coaches to follow, almost simultaneously, the main training events and trends occurring in other countries.

## CONCLUSION

The thoughts of the coordinators signal that there is a lot of potential in the introduction to tennis landscape in Brazil. Moreover, it has been observed that some of the actions carried out in recent years – such as the promotion of the Tennis10s programme and the training courses – seem to be contributing directly to the pedagogical practice of the coaches. This information is relevant to the evaluation of the actions taken so far, and it may contribute to future interventions.

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