



Communication tips for juniors

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ABSTRACT

Tennis in modern times is an industry that integrates sport, entertainment and business together. Nowadays, a junior tennis player is not limited to what they do on the tennis court. The junior player must be ready to face other responsibilities, among which are the media and commercial related activities.

Key words:

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INTRODUCTION

Coaches offer players multidisciplinary development. Their programmes can include technical, tactical, physical, nutritional and psychological training in sport. However, teaching young professionals how to deal with the media, and how to use social communication tools to get the maximum benefit possible is often overseen.

Junior tennis players should be aware of the role of the media in the projection of their professional careers. Greater or lesser presence of the media is an intangible value that can provide a source of income other than competitive activities.

The greater public exposure allows the player to have new sponsors, and to have even greater exposure, something particularly significant in individual sports such as tennis, thus, the importance of the tennis player showing their personality and helping to promote tennis in general. A greater, positive public exposure of a player within the media ultimately leads to increased fame and sponsorship opportunities.

THE MEDIA VALUE OF A TENNIS PLAYER

The main factor determining a player's media value is their results. The increase in fame after winning a title is directly proportional to the greater capacity to generate extra sporting income.

However, there are other factors that impact on the exposure of a tennis player, and which, at times, can make their fame even greater than what they can deserve for their strictly competitive activity.

ASPECTS THAT DETERMINE THE MEDIA VALUE OF A TENNIS PLAYER

- Current sporting performances.
- Past sporting background.
- Personality.
- Personal factors other than sporting performance.
- Other variables, for example, the popularity of tennis in a certain country or the number of performance tennis players in that country etc.

Media attention is only usually given to successful tennis players, both national and international. Attention is not often given to the activities of other players. Therefore, it must be the tennis players themselves, their coaches or their staff who inform about their sporting achievements.

More often than not, tennis players do not have great abilities to be able to deal with the media, because they lack this initiative, and often overlook their relationship with journalists and the media. This is especially true in those who prefer to

be more receptive to their local, regional and more specialised media.

In order to raise awareness of the situation, the Sport Upper Council, (CSD, in Spanish), organised in Madrid in 2014, a course on the 'communication and image of the athlete' which contributed some behaviour guidelines for emerging athletes:

- Be active with the media and with communication in general: This helps in instigating new opportunities.
- Look for opportunities of visibility sharing events: Photographs and actions on social media with those who have many fans/likes/ followers such as other athletes and well known celebrities.



- Establish collaborations that are outside of one's comfort zone: It is possible that in tennis, players have a certain perception to others. It is necessary to look for actions that provide visibility with other people and in environments that are not habitual for our discipline to become part of a wider network of people.
- Being creative: Tennis many not have many followers in one particular country, but it may do in a neighbouring one. It can be advised to always look for relationships with national companies that are trying to enter the market.

Management of the personal brand

Sponsors only invest in a tennis player if the media value that he/ she can create, can bring about good profitability or intangible value in terms of brand image.

Therefore, the search for media visibility must go hand in hand with the construction of an appropriate personal brand, since companies are particularly careful when contacting emerging athletes, particularly when they represent individual sports like tennis.

Alejandro Kowalski suggested that investing and sponsoring individual athletes is a risk for any company, since an individual athlete can bring about problems or an image crisis

due to personal attitudes or conflicting opinions etc. It was indicated that there are three features that a company expects from the athlete it sponsors:

- Results / Success: These have an impact on visibility.
- Values: The athlete's values must be in line with those of the company.
- Visibility: An effort must be made in order to get visibility. The coach or the player must have an updated dossier to give to prospective sponsors or communication media. This paper or multimedia format dossier should include a personal file, match results, photographs, newspaper clippings, social media publications, etc.

Risks and opportunities in social media

The creation of a personal brand starts with the tennis player's attitude on the court, in their personal relationships with the other players, technical staff, umpires, professionals of any field, and amateurs in general.

Social media provides emerging players the first global projection platform for their public image on the internet. Most emerging players have their own profile on the main platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), making personal use without realising how important they are for managing their brand.

Potential sponsors study the public image of athletes to see if it matches the values of their brand, and one of the first things they will trace is the image an athlete projects on social media. Thus, tennis players must be aware that a profile is not just a tool for personal use, it is also a professional tool.

Managing a profile in the social media involves risk that also provides opportunities. Being 'prudential' is important when posting online in order to avoid damaging the personal brand that is desired.

Athletes, in general, use social media to publish news, to make statements, and to express opinions, a relatively new way of interacting with the public and the media. This involves making their profiles more dynamic, posting personal photographs and videos which take them even closer to their followers.

Social media also provides sponsoring opportunities, both for professional and junior players, since they represent commercial communication with sponsors. Those brands that sponsor big stars, reduce production and emission costs of their advertising dramatically, and multiply the target audience they reach.

Emerging players can make similar use of their profiles to sponsor the brands that support them. Gone are the days when tennis players only offered to wear the logo on rackets or on t-shirts. It is important, however, to calculate communication actions to get the greatest effectiveness possible, and to avoid rejection on the part of the followers.

The tennis player- journalist relationship

The relationship between the tennis player and the journalist is not always easy, due to different reasons. It is open to debate from an ethical point of view, since personal and professional relationships can be conflicting. While the journalist looks for privileged information, the player looks for their benefit.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON THE TENNIS PLAYER- JOURNALIST RELATIONSHIP

- The personality of the player.
- Their professional and personal environment.
- Current results.
- The eccentricity of the sporting media.
- The personal relationship that the player may have with the journalist.

- The volume of demands from the media.

At ATP and WTA professional tournaments, it is the press person appointed by the organisation who acts as a mediator between the tennis player and the journalist, together with the person sent by the communication department of each competition. The main function is to coordinate press conferences and one-to-one personal interviews.

This is not frequent on the rest of the International Tennis Federation (ITF) and junior circuits, where nobody is in charge of the press, and it is the journalist who contacts the players directly.

The ITF published a text to raise awareness amongst junior players about the importance of communicating with the media in their careers. These are the main guidelines:

- They must be aware that the media are an important part of the life of a professional player in addition to training, coaching and playing matches.

- A personal interview is good to sponsor a player.

- There is no need for players to be afraid: If the player is concerned about an interview, they can ask for help preparing for it.

- Bear in mind that it is the player who controls the information revealed.

- It is advisable to try to get to know the journalists in particular

regions or countries, and even foreign journalists, for when the professional level is reached.

It must be understood that not all journalists who carry out interviews are tennis specialists.

- Neither journalists nor much of the public know what it means to be a professional tennis player: They expect to learn this information from the players' themselves.

- Questions about private life: These are typically asked to gain an insight into the player's life, however, they should not be intrusive.

- Punctuality when attending media commitments is crucial.

It is also important for players to be able to give interviews in English, so as not to miss the opportunity to interact with the journalists and global fans during international competitions.

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