

The junior coach tournament attendance dilemma: How willing are parents to pay coaches to attend matches?

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ABSTRACT

Many tennis coaches are paid by the hour. Unfortunately, this pay structure can contribute to poor coach attendance at tournaments. This study sought to determine whether parents would be willing to pay coaches to attend tournaments. Findings show a willingness on the behalf of parents to pay. This has implications for how coaches may reduce the financial burden of forgoing a weekend's coaching, while potentially enhancing athlete development.

Key words: willingness to pay, parents, coaches, tournament attendance.

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INTRODUCTION

A considerable number of tennis coaches are paid by the hour. As they accrue more hours on court, their income increases. A compensation model centered on hourly pay makes sense in this context. Demand for tennis coaching can fluctuate. By paying coaches an hourly wage, tennis clubs and organizations assume less risk. Consequentially, coaches under this wage structure, are incentivized to maximize their time spent on-court coaching. Although such a form of motivation can be beneficial to clubs, as well as coaches who experience a greater degree of freedom to form their work schedules under an hourly wage structure, it is not without its downsides. Coaches are most in demand outside of regular work and school weeks (i.e., on evenings and weekends). This can be problematic, as these hours often coincide with junior tournaments and competitions. Coaches are faced then, with the choice to dedicate weekends to on-court coaching or attending their athletes' tournaments for which they are seldom paid. As a result, in the sport of tennis, it is quite common for coaches to go extended periods without seeing their athletes compete, much to the disdain of junior tennis parents (Horne et al., 2020).

In some instances, coaches do charge a fee for their presence at tournaments. These coaches are able to attend without forgoing a weekends worth of income while providing a valuable service to athletes and their parents. A service that includes pre-match preparation, match analysis and debrief, as well as providing coaches with first-hand knowledge for designing future training sessions and schedules. Unfortunately, this practice is not widespread and tends to be confined to high-performance programs and academies where coaches' tournament attendance fee is built into the program package. It is not yet known whether such practices can be replicated outside of high-performance settings. Setting where it is more likely parents, who are considered the



purchaser of youth sport programming (Green & Chalip, 1998; Vealey & Chase, 2016), will pay coaches directly. Therefore, to determine whether the opportunity exists for coaches to charge for their tournament attendance in other tennis clubs and facilities, further investigation is warranted. In seeking to address the dilemma of coach tournament attendance, the purpose of the current study was to determine parents' willingness to pay (WTP) coaches to attend their children's tournament match.

WILLINGNESS TO PAY

Willingness to pay is a popular method employed by market researchers to measure the price consumers are willing to pay for a specific product or service. It has been adopted in the sport industry to gauge interest in amateur sport and recreation programs (e.g., Johnson et al., 2007), ticket pricing at professional soccer games (Kemper & Breuer, 2015) and pricing for sport club membership fees (Wicker, 2011). The contingent valuation model (CVM) was considered most

appropriate for the study's purpose as respondents in this model are asked directly what they would pay for a specific product or service (Mitchell & Carson, 1989). The CVM has, however, received some criticism. A main point of criticism against using the CVM concerns the potential for bias. The fear being study participants respond with the WTP a hypothetical higher price than what they would actually pay. In the context of the current study then, participants may show a higher WTP for a coach to attend than they might in pay in actuality. It is important to consider this when evaluating the study's findings.

In determining parents' WTP for their children's coaches to attend a tournament match, the study set out to answer the following research questions:

- Would parents be willing to pay coaches to attend their children's matches?
- To what extent are parents willing to pay coaches to attend their children's matches?

METHOD

As a part of a larger project, surveys were distributed to parents of junior tennis players who have competed regularly in the six months prior to the study. Purposive sampling was initially used to approach parents at tournaments in the Midwest United States. Parents were also reached through popular social media pages, as well as through the researcher's network of tennis coaches and administrators. Participants were then asked to share with other tennis parents whose children had been competing regularly. A total of 130 parent surveys were completed and returned. The WTP measure was included in the survey for the larger project, with the measure adapted to fit the context of the current study (i.e., junior tennis parents' WTP coaches to attend a tournament match). Participants were asked to choose from one of seven available listed options. The options included: no coach in attendance, \$0, \$50, \$100, \$150, \$200, \$250. Data analysis for the WTP measure included a frequency count to determine parents' WTP for the available options.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of parents' WTP for coaches to attend a tournament. Although parents' preferences varied, their preferred option was to pay \$50 for a coach to attend one match. An overwhelming 42.3% of parents were willing to pay this amount, with \$100 for a coach to attend one match parents' next preferred option, with 27.7% of parents selecting this option. As the two most popular options, parents' exact WTP coaches to attend one tournament match likely falls between \$50-\$100. Findings also demonstrate that nearly 20% of parents would not pay for a coach to attend their children's match or would prefer the coach not to attend. As over 80% of parents were willing to pay at least \$50 to a coach to attend one match, findings suggest a market exists for coaches to charge for tournament attendance.

Table 1

Frequency distribution of parents' Willingness to Pay.

Willingness	Frequency	Percent
No coach attend	7	5.4
\$0	18	13.8
\$50	55	42.3
\$100	36	27.7
\$150	5	3.8
\$200	5	3.8
\$250	4	3.1
Total	130	100.0

DISCUSSION

The study set out to ascertain parents' WTP for coaches to attend their children's tournament matches. Findings show parents would be willing to compensate a coach for attending a tournament match. This is an important finding, as it illustrates how athlete development could potentially be enhanced within the confines of the current youth tennis business model.

The study highlights a viable solution to coaches' lack of attendance at their athletes' tournaments within the existing compensation model. Charging parents a fee to attend athletes' tournament matches can be beneficial for several reasons. First, it will incentivize coach attendance at matches. Likely improving attendance and, therefore, enhance athletes' development. Second, it does not require coaches to forgo an entire weekends income. Further, the transaction can occur within the existing business model for junior tennis. And finally, by improving coaches' tournament attendance, it will assuage parents' existing frustrations with coaches current attendance records.

As findings suggest, it is recommended coaches charge parents a fee similar to what they charge for an hour or two's worth of instruction. Additionally, it is conceivable that coaches may be able to attend a tournament where they have multiple athletes participating, thus earning additional attendance fees. Certainly, the specifics of each agreement between parents and coaches would require negotiation to determine a price, and precisely what services parents are purchasing (i.e., pre-match preparation, post-match written report/analysis).

The current business model for youth tennis is well established and unlikely to change in the near future. It is imperative that ways are sought to improve current practices within tennis's existing structure. The current study accomplishes that by showing parents are willing to pay coaches to attend within the typical hourly wage structure. More frequent tournament attendance would appease parents, while more importantly, providing coaches with a deeper understanding of how their athletes perform in competitive settings. Thus, improving parent-coach relations and enhancing athlete development. To

further establish the true viability of parents paying for coaches to attend, future research should investigate at what fee coaches would be willing to attend. Failure for parents and coaches to align on an appropriate fee would act as a barrier to developing such an arrangement.

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