

The joys of being a tour coach lie in the eyes of the beholder

Janet Young

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the roles of a tennis coach on the professional tour and the key characteristics of 'life on the road'. The paper further proposes that different mind-sets underpin positive and negative experiences as a tour coach, and offers suggestions to facilitate and enhance positive experiences. These experiences are critically significant given they impact on a coach's well-being, job satisfaction and performance (Gallwey, 2009).

Key words: travel ,tour, coaching, mindset

Received: 12 December 2017

Accepted: 6 January 2018

Corresponding author:

Janet Young.

Email:

janet_young7@yahoo.com.au

INTRODUCTION

"The travel is fine. I've been travelling even since being retired so it's not really an issue for me. The bigger issue is family, and not wanting to be away from them. I also have to have a passion for what I'm doing; If I don't feel like it's worth my time helping somebody, or I don't have a good connection with them, then it's not something I want to take the time to do. At this point in my life, I have the luxury of being able to pick and choose what I want to do" - (Michael Chang, coach of Kei Nishikori)

Travel is a way of life for many tennis coaches who support and guide their players at training and tournament venues away from home, both nationally and internationally. For many coaches, travel is exciting, fun, exhilarating and full of adventure. Being a coach on the professional tour can be the ultimate dream job. On the other hand, travel for many coaches conjures up a range of negative emotions and feelings including loneliness, boredom, resentment from being away from loved ones at home and frustration at a lack of routine.

This paper highlights the roles of a tennis coach on the professional tour and the key characteristics of 'life on the road'. The paper further proposes that different mind-sets underpin positive and negative experiences as a tour coach, and offers suggestions to facilitate and enhance positive experiences. These experiences are critically significant given they impact on a coach's well-being, job satisfaction and performance (Gallwey, 2009).

THE ROLES OF THE TOUR COACH

The multi-faceted roles of coaches are well documented (e.g., Crespo, Reid & Quinn, 2006). In brief, a coach is a person who plans, guides and monitors a player's development across technique, game planning, fitness and mental strength (Mouratoglou, 2011).



According to Patrick Mouratoglou (current coach of Serena Williams), these extensive responsibilities are further extended for the tour coach who is often charged with organising travel, booking training facilities and courts, selecting and organising practice and training partners, getting racquets strung, managing nutrition and liaising with sponsors, tournament officials and/or media as required.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF 'LIFE ON THE ROAD'

While differences certainly exist between circuits (e.g., Junior, ITF Futures, Challengers, ATP or WTA etc.), there are also some common features of 'life on the road'.

Key characteristics of 'life on the road'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are often extended periods of time away from family and friends. Live out of a suitcase' – generally weekly travelling to tournament sites and accommodation. Considerable travel (plane, train and/or road) is involved and can be associated with jet lag and travel fatigue. There can be long delays for security checks when travelling. A variety of cultures, customs, foods and beverages can be encountered. There can be a variance of daily routines with no two days likely to be the same with different match and training times and playing conditions. There is a duty of care and responsibility from the coach towards at least one other person. There are often unfamiliar work environments at tournament and training sites. Pressurised, stressful and unfamiliar situations can challenge coach-player relationships as any issues often get magnified 'out of proportion'. Travelling may include periods of being alone and eating meals on one's own

Table 1. The key characteristics of 'life on the road' for a tour Coach (Davis, 2014; Terry, 2010, Toleski; 2012).

Mind-sets underpinning positive experiences	Mind-sets underpinning negative experiences
<p>'Life on the road' is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A privilege. An honour. A choice that is freely made. A learning experience. An opportunity for personal and pro-fessional growth. An opportunity to make a significant contribution to a player's develop-ment. A journey to be enjoyed. A passion. An exciting challenge 	<p>'Life on the road' is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A chore. An unavoidable necessity and a demand and/or requirement of the job. An obligation. Expected by others (e.g. the player, the player's family, National Tennis Associations).

Table 2. Mind-sets that typically underpin positive and negative experiences of 'life on the road' (Gallwey, 2009; King, 2008).

As noted in the introduction, 'life on the road' can be experienced differently by individual tour coaches. One explanation can be found in the mind-set of the individual, with contrasting mindsets typically underpinning positive and negative experiences. In this context mind-set refers to an individual's perspective on/approach to a given situation or issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mind-sets can be developed, changed and/or modified. So what can a coach do to cultivate and nurture a mind-set that is conducive to seeing 'life on the road' in the most favourable light? A coach may wish to consider the suggestions listed and adapt these to their own individual needs and circumstances.

Realise the value of such an opportunity

It is important to be grateful for the opportunity as not all coaches have the ability and talent to be a tour coach. It should be considered a privilege to be a member of a relatively small but select group of travelling coaches. It is an opportunity that may not necessarily be offered, or open, again in the future.

Set goals

Gallwey (2009) recommends setting goals relating to three components of a job, namely performance outcomes, what is intended to be learnt and the degree of enjoyment that is wanted from the job. Setting specific goals will help to harness resources to find solutions when challenges arise, as they invariably will on any tour.

Pay attention to the detail

Thoroughly plan travel in order to reduce surprises and problems. Investigating travel is a relatively easy task currently, with so much information about accommodation, transportation options, weather, tournament sites, foods and safety warnings, etc. available on the internet. Such planning provides a sense of control, peace and comfort, at least over those matters that can be controlled 'on the road'.

Ask for help and support from a mentor or experienced colleagues

Not everything has to be solved alone. Others that are respected can offer insightful feedback, guidance and ideas on how to best approach issues. Often the first step of asking others for help is the most difficult. It may be surprising how willing and pleased others are to help.

Watch, listen and learn

Bob Brett, the appointed LTA Director of Player Development in 2014, provides sound advice regarding the opportunity that the tour affords for continued professional development:

'Listen and watch everything that is happening both on and off the court. See what others do well. Pay attention and see if the knowledge you gain may be transferred to the player you work with' (Davis, 2014).

Focus on a critical coach-player relationship

Creating and managing a healthy and respectful coach-player relationship is an enviable skill. Paying attention to the ability to communicate with a player is always paramount. All communication needs to be caring, timely and appropriate.

Seek a good balance with work, family, friends and recreation

Setting aside time in the daily schedule to be spent individually is important. For some coaches this means time allocated to fitness, rest, friends, shopping, sight-seeing and/or communicating with loved ones at home. Catering for one's own needs should not be ignored but may require some creative time management.

Keep a daily 'thankful' or 'gratitude' log

Make it a daily routine to record 3-5 things that have gone (particularly) well personally on tour that day. The purchasing of a special book or journal for this specific purpose might be beneficial.



Be kind to yourself

No good comes out of being negative about errors, mistakes or oversights. Remembering that even perfectionists are not perfect and 'life is a series of lessons to be learned'. Being able to accept imperfections, adapting if needs be and trying to find the positives in disappointments to be an even better coach and person are essential (King, 2008).}

Be clear about 'the name of the game'

At selected times during a tour, a period of self-reflection should occur. Is a difference being made to the player/s? Does the player always give 100% effort and work diligently every day to be the best player he/she could be? If the answers are 'yes', then the coach, and the player(s) can be seen as being successful together.

CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on the psychology of being a tennis coach on the professional tour. It suggests that a coach's mind-set is a critical factor in determining how he/she experiences 'life on the road'. It is not the only factor but one most worthy of acknowledgement, consideration and action. Tour coaches can take an active role in determining their own fate. Firstly it takes an awareness of the power of the mind and then a willingness and commitment to develop, cultivate and nurture an inquisitive, creative and reflective mind-set. The onus is very much on the tour coach to make his/her job the ultimate dream job. The joys of the job are very much in the eyes of the beholder.

REFERENCES

- Crespo, M., Reid, M., Quinn, A. (2006). Tennis Psychology: 200+ practical drills and the latest research. London: ITF Ltd.
- Davis, R. (2014). Overseeing the superstars. Australian Tennis Magazine. 39(6), 50.
- Gallwey, W.T. (2009). The Inner Game of Stress. New York: Random House.
- King, B.J. (2008). Pressure is a Privilege. Lessons I've Learned from Life and the Battle of the Sexes. New York: Lifetime Media, Inc.
- Mouratoglou, P. (2011). The role of the coach. Australian Tennis Magazine. 36(6), 9.
- Terry, P.C. (2010). It's nice to go travelling, BUT... In S. Hanrahan & M. Anderson (Eds.), Routledge Handbook of Applied Sport Psychology: A Comprehensive Guide for Students and Practitioners (pp. 345-354). New York: Routledge.
- Toleski, D. (2012). Committing to travel. Australian Tennis Magazine, 37(7), 58-59.

RECOMMENDED ITF TENNIS ACADEMY CONTENT (CLICK BELOW)



Copyright (c) 2018 Janet Young



This text is under a [Creative Commons BY 4.0 license](#)

You are free to Share - copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format – and Adapt the content - remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially under the following terms:

Attribution: You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

[CC BY 4.0 license terms summary](#) [CC BY 4.0 license terms](#)