

Promoting tennis in Spain: The example of the RFET Amateur Circuit

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ABSTRACT

Sports practice has nowadays great importance for society to maintain health and guarantee an optimal quality of life. Sports such as tennis have been of interest to young and old, both at a global and national level, generating programs for the introduction to this sport. That is the reason why the Amateur Circuit of the Royal Spanish Tennis Federation was created as a competition that encourages motivation to practice tennis aimed at amateur players. It was created in 2017, reaching its highest levels in 2019, the year before the Covid-19 pandemic. It can be concluded that the promotion of the sport through competitive activities such as this one, allows to increase the interest and participation of children and adults in tennis at the beginners' level.

Key words: tennis, amateurs, promotion, amateur circuit.

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INTRODUCTION

Sport today is a fundamental aspect to facilitate well-being and quality of life, as it allows the development of leisure activities and outdoor enjoyment individually and/or in groups. Studies prove that physical exercise reduces discomfort, anxiety and generally improves health (Córdoba, et al, 2018; Álvarez, et al, 2020; Camacho, 2021).

Global sports practice is one of the topics of interest for the organisations responsible for health and sport promotion, as current lifestyles, the use of new technologies, etc., have led to inactivity at all ages, which has an impact on the risk of developing chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity, among others (Martínez, et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). Therefore, plans are continually being developed to increase participation in physical activity (Arufe, et al., 2017).

In Spain, sport practice has been increasing over the last 30 years, a fact that is also a trend in the rest of Europe and other continents (García and Llopis, 2017). Studies conducted by the High Sports Council and CIS (2020) show that sport practice has increased during the period between 2015 and 2020 (table 1).

The data show that an average of 60% do not practice any sport at all, with 58% practising at least once a month. It is worth noting that, in all frequencies of sport practice, it is evident that in 2020 there has been a growth in the incidence, approximately 5% between 2015 and 2020.

Sport in Spain is organised by federations and sponsored by different companies, thus achieving a competitive level that allows physical activity and sport to be promoted in



the general population (Valiño, 2019). This article presents an example of a programme created to promote tennis, which is one of the sports that has more fans around the world, regardless of age, sex, and level of play.

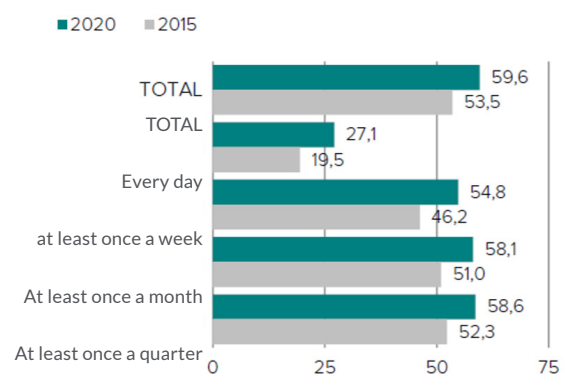


Figure 1. Evolution of sport practice in Spain 2015-2020. CSD (2020).

Tennis has undoubtedly become a recognised sport of interest (Marín, 2010) and in recent years has progressively increased its practice worldwide (ITF, 2021). It has become a sport that is widely disseminated worldwide through the media, with an increase in interest in the game, the number of players who play it and the existing sports facilities (public and private) (Martínez, 2013).

Several studies have investigated the extent to which the practice of tennis has been affected by Covid-19 (UNF, 2020; Slater and Watkins, 2020). Furthermore, in Spain this impact is evidenced in the statistics of sports habits of the CIS (2020), which shows that, in 2015, 14% of those who played sports chose tennis, while in 2020 only 7% played tennis. Another indicator that can be mentioned is the weekly participation in tennis, which between 2010 and 2015 stood at 1.9%, and in 2020 at 1.6%. This drop is mainly evident in 2020 due to the Covid-19 situation, in which sporting activities were restricted, and rules were established for access to sports facilities to reduce infection and control the health situation.

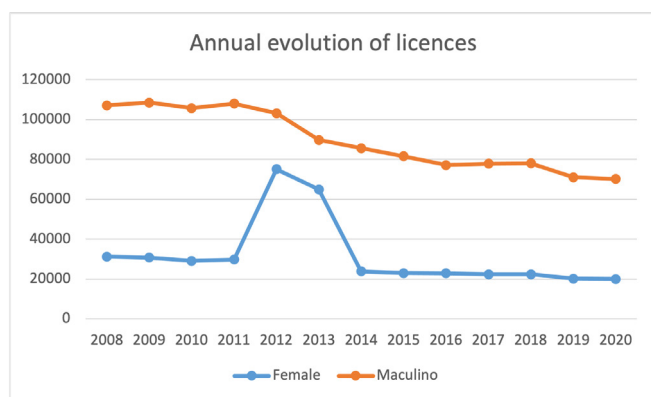


Figure 2. Annual evolution of the number of Royal Spanish Tennis Federation sporting licences between 2008 and 2020, by gender.

The data on the number of licences shows a decrease, not because there are fewer players, but because there are fewer players competing or interested in renewing their licence each year (Chacón, et al., 2018).

The aim of this article is to analyse the promotion of tennis as a sport in Spain through the Amateur Circuit programme promoted by the Royal Spanish Tennis Federation (RFET, 2021).



Other countries have created programmes with the same objectives as the Amateur Circuit programme organised by the RFET. This is the case of Argentina with the amateur tennis circuit (Asociación Argentina de Tenis s/f), France, with the tennis festival (French Tennis Federation, 2019), or England with the local leagues (LTA, 2021). All organised by their respective Federations.

ANALYSIS OF THE AMATEUR CIRCUIT

The Amateur Circuit was created in 2017 and originated from the idea of organising tennis competitions in different categories for beginner players from children to adults. The Circuit is under the federation umbrella, to promote the practice of tennis as a sport at the amateur level. Thus, in 2019, the year before the pandemic, 125 tournaments were held throughout Spain with 6,000 participants.

The Amateur Circuit is managed by the Royal Spanish Tennis Federation with the help of the respective Territorial Federations. It is a tennis circuit played throughout Spain, mainly in small clubs lacking activity, aimed at players of all ages and beginner/amateur level. It has been created mainly to motivate and encourage family participation, as well as facilitating socialisation.

The main objective of the amateur circuit is that tennis players can compete according to their level without losing to many matches in their first competitive experiences, and playing close to their homes. The organisers of each tournament can also be motivated to deliver a fun event and improve their own brand, thus promoting the sport and above all its practice among children, young people, and adults, in small clubs and even rural areas. The competition is organised from February to November, and the Masters event is held in December with the best ranked players in their category in their geographical area. At the Masters, many parallel activities are organised in an event called "Tennis Fiesta", where the best Spanish professional tennis players are brought together with the best amateurs in a city without such a strong tennis tradition. Some of the professional players that have participated in the event have been Roberto Bautista, Pablo Carreño, Pablo Andújar, David Ferrer, Alejandro Davidovich, Carla Suárez, Anabel Medina, Juan Carlos Ferrero, Alex Corretja, etc. The aim is to motivate amateur players by getting to know up close some of the best tennis players in the world.

In this way, the practice of tennis is promoted in different venues, for different audiences, having as a centre the sports clubs that promotes our sport. This is how this

event motivates people through a competitive, healthy, and innovative environment. To maintain the interest in playing tennis, clubs organise also different activities, such as training sessions to improve the playing level of competitors as soon as possible.

The circuit is aimed at children and adults who have already started playing tennis. By participating in different competitions against players of a similar level they can show what they have learnt and evaluate their own performance to improve. Table 1 summarises the main features of this project.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Amateur Tennis Circuit. Source: RFET, 2021.

Name	Amateur Circuit
Dates	2017-present.
Organising entity	Real Federación Española de Tenis together with Territorial Federations and Clubs.
Target audience	Children, young people, and adults at beginners' level.
Competitive format	Each participant plays several short matches in a single weekend according to the level they belong to, adjusting the size of the courts, rackets and balls to the age and level of the players.
Fee	Singles: 8, 10 and 12 € depending on age Doubles: 16 and 20 €/couple depending on age Teams 50€/league, 15€/cup.
Categories	The categories are U6, U8, U10-1st, U10-2nd, U12, U15 and U18 in the children's age group and senior (19 to 49) 1st, senior (19 to 49) 2nd and +50 in the adult age group.
Ranking	RACE for each category plus participation points.
Funding	All material and shipments will be paid for by the RFET. Registrations are split 50/50 with the club.

In 2017, 30 pilot events were organised between Extremadura and the Valencian Community, completely antagonistic communities in terms of tennis (in statistical comparisons these communities are at opposite poles), to test the success of the product. The Community of Valencia is one of the Spanish regions with the most players, clubs, academies, coaches, referees, events, and economic resources, while Extremadura is one of the regions with the lowest number of athletes, federated clubs, companies linked to sport, events, and expenditure on sport by municipalities and other entities (Ministry of Culture and Sport, 2019).

It is important to note that, due to the pandemic situation, the circuit planned for 2020 and 2021 was affected. To participate, a federation licence or Tennis Card (cheaper non-competitive licence) is compulsory.

The investment in the programme is approximately 80,000 euros per year. In 2022, and improvement compared to the 2019 figures is expected. The success of the programme is measured by the number of tournaments requested by clubs to organise, the number of participants, and the number of licences obtained for these events.



CONCLUSION

Quality of life is a subject of increasing interest today, that is why tools have been created that favour people's physical and mental health. For this reason, the practice of physical activity has become one of the most important factors in maintaining people's health, and mental and social balance. Therefore, more strategies are being used by different sports to capture the interest of players from an early age. This is the case of Spanish tennis, where through the Royal Spanish Tennis Federation, the Amateur Circuit has been organised since 2017. These are tournaments for different categories in which children, young people and adults of beginner level participate. These tournaments facilitate not only that those who already play continue playing tennis, but also that those new players join the game. Therefore, not only competitive players but also amateur players can take part in competitions.

Finally, it is important to mention that the circuit has been progressing gradually, and that it is reaching more and more places and including more innovative formats such as doubles or team tournaments.

It is therefore advisable that the various tennis federations strive to create programmes of this kind to achieve the goal of increasing the number of players participating in our sport. We hope that this article has provided some practical ideas for the implementation of such initiatives.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

The author declares that he does not have any conflict of interest and that he did not receive any funding to conduct the research.

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