



# Continuous professional development in Europe.

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## ABSTRACT

With the game ever evolving, coaches need practical support and education on an ongoing basis. The present study summarizes the results of a survey of 24 European nations on Continuous Professional Development (CPD) practices within tennis coach education. Data was collected at the European Coaches Symposium held in Portugal in September 2011. Results from the study showed the different incentive strategies used for engaging coaches in CPD, the use of online resources for engaging in CPD, as well as the prevalence of mentoring programmes across Europe. Results are discussed in relation to improving CPD procedures in Europe and worldwide, as well as potential future directions for CPD.

**Key words:** Continuous professional development, Coach education.

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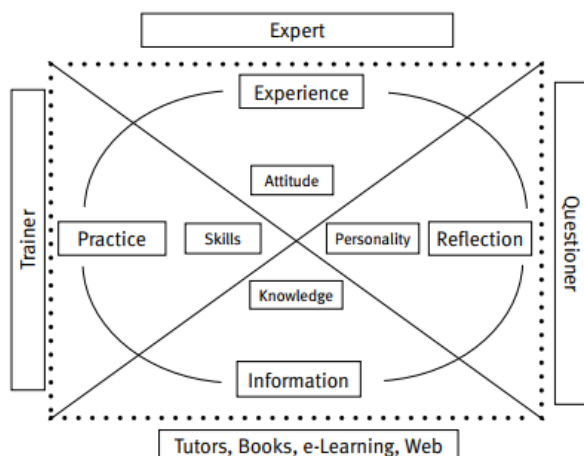
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## INTRODUCTION

The game of tennis is constantly developing, improving and reaching new levels. It should therefore follow that coaching behaviour and expertise must develop with it. From the adoption of new teaching methodologies right down to the daily application of modern advances in technique, a coach must continually strive to improve their level of knowledge and expertise if their intention is to produce players for the modern game.

As in the hypothetical model below by Van Fraayenhoven (2006), knowledge acquisition by a coach should not cease after initial certification, but rather continue by a constant and cyclical process of gaining new knowledge and applying it. Formal Continuous Professional Development (CPD) undoubtedly plays a key role in this cycle, by supporting coaches' learning on a constant basis. Furthermore, research has asserted that the key to improved coaching lies within both coach education and development (Woodman, 1993; Cushion, Armour & Jones, 2003). With the important role that CPD plays in Coach Development, the current research investigates a number of aspects surrounding CPD practices in 24 European countries.



**Table 1. Hypothetical model of knowledge acquisition for coaches (Van Fraayenhoven, 2006).**

## METHOD

Surveys were distributed to the coach education directors and national coaches of 24 European nations plus Australia (N=25) at the Tennis Europe Coaches Symposium, Vilamoura, Portugal. Participating nations included Finland, Turkey, Switzerland, Netherlands, Latvia, Italy, UK, Belgium (Dutch), Belgium (AFT), Cyprus, Spain, Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine, Austria, Sweden, Norway, Hungary, Germany, France, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania and Ireland. Australia, although not a European nation also participated in the survey. Results were analyzed and are displayed visually in the results section below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research has shown that one of the most relied upon sources of CPD is through informal coach to coach learning and exchange of information- coaches serve what is described in physical education as an ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Cushion et. al, 2003). This observation of other more experienced coaches with different proficiencies is a key aspect of developing professionally and is supported in the literature. However, in addition to informal CPD, it is recognised that coaches should engage in formal means of education on a regular basis.

Incentivising Continuous Professional Development

Indeed one of the key issues associated with CPD is encouraging coaches to participate in such events, courses and educational workshops. From a practical perspective, attendance at conferences and training courses can ensue financial costs associated with attendance (in addition to the coach not being able to work whilst attending the event). Investing in professional development can therefore at times be seen as ‘unattractive’ for some coaches, and they therefore often abstain from formal CPD. The pie chart below illustrates what incentives and rewards are in place across Europe to encourage coaches to engage in CPD, and therefore continue to improve their level of expertise and knowledge.

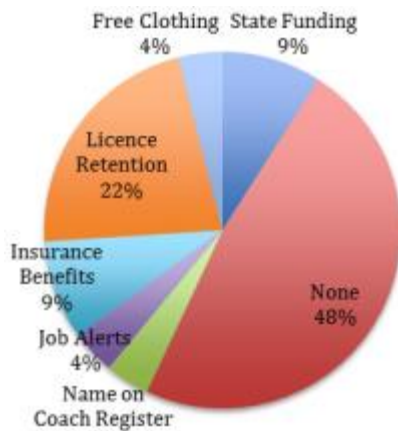


Figure 1. What incentives/rewards are in place to encourage your coaches to engage with CPD?

The above pie chart demonstrates a number of useful incentives adopted by European nations, including primarily the use of license retention to encourage CPD attendance. The use of a licensing scheme within a coach education programme allows for a system whereby coaches must ‘earn’ their license by engaging in CPD throughout the year. This is a commonly used approach by many nations. The use of a license is therefore recommended as a way in which to attract coaches to engage in CPD, and therefore raise their knowledge

base, experience and level of coaching. The results however illustrate that only 22% of nations in Europe currently engage in the use of license retention as an incentive to engage in CPD.

In addition to license points, insurance benefits, job notifications and inclusion on a coaches register were found to be other forms of reward. However, it is evident again from figure 1, that although there are a number of useful incentives for coaches, a vast majority of European nations (48%) do not engage in any incentive/reward scheme to encourage a coach to engage in CPD.

Continuous Professional Development online

The use of online resources is continually gaining strength with technological advances that allow for more effective online distance learning, and also the management and tracking of that learning through Learning Management Systems (commonly referred to as LMS).

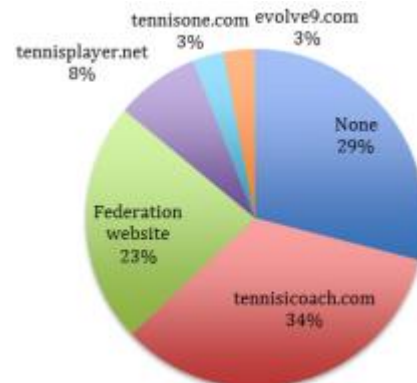


Figure 2. Websites where coaches receive ‘free’ or subsidized access from their National Association.

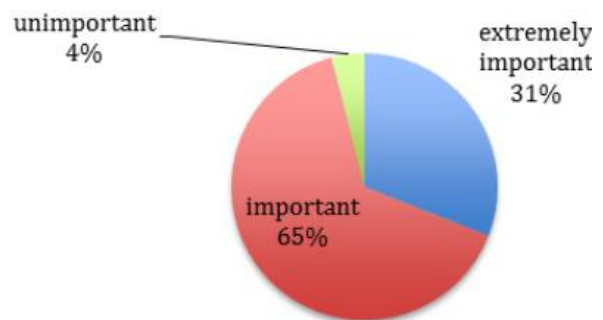


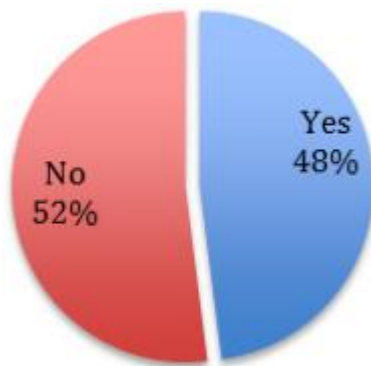
Figure 3. European attitudes towards the importance of distance learning and online resources for CPD.

Online resources (see figure 2.) are an attractive CPD tool due to the convenience they present to the coach. Resources such as the ITF Tennis iCoach allow coaches to expand and improve knowledge, and attend conferences virtually. In the future, online CPD will continue to become a more important tool. Indeed, a further result from the present survey indicated a

positive attitude towards online CPD from a majority of European Nations (see figure 3.) National Associations are therefore encouraged to continue to make use of online resources that provide cost effective and convenient continuous education for coaches.vv.

**Mentoring programmes**

Figure 4. below shows the proportion of nations that have a mentoring programme in place that coaches can avail of after initial qualification. Mentoring involves ongoing training and advice from more experienced coaches, in order to support a coach during that vital “in the field” period. Results show more than 50% of European nations are without a mentoring programme. Research into mentoring programme efficacy outside of sport has commonly reported benefits including increased levels of learning and coaching, assistance with career planning, and psychosocial support (Eby & Lockwood, 2004). Furthermore, the development of reflective skills has been cited by Knowles et al. (2005) as a key element of coach development. Engagement in mentoring programmes undoubtedly fosters reflection and self-evaluation practices. With these valuable aids potentially at hand, a recommendation of the current research is therefore to encourage National Associations to adopt the use of mentoring programmes as part of their overall CPD programme, if not already doing so.



**Figure 4. Nations with a Mentoring Programme in place.**

**CPD FOR THE FUTURE**

The table below shows a number of interesting facts about CPD. Firstly, the development of e-learning is seen as a high priority relative to other forms. CPD that is available online (therefore bringing convenience and cost effectiveness) is by far the most attractive forum for coaches, and is therefore more likely to be undertaken. In addition, the implementation of a licensing scheme is seen as a priority. The use of licensing schemes is not only an incentive for coaches to continually educate themselves, but it is also an important step for tennis coaching to be legally recognised as a formal profession (similar to the legal and medical sector for example).

PRIORITY IN CPD FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE IS:	
Response	Number of responses (Nations)
Develop e-learning opportunities	3
Implement licensing scheme	3
Involve university education opportunities	3
How to work effectively with starter players	1
Develop international cooperation	1
Make it compulsory	1
Specific theme workshops	1
Develop a database of coaches	1
Increase the number of coaches involved	1
Run a course for tutors	1

**Table 2. CPD priorities for National Federations.**

**CONCLUSION**

Coach education has been cited as being a crucial element for improving the standards of a sport (Cunningham, 2000). From a practical perspective, the modern day coach is now frequently expected to take on a variety of tasks beyond simply coaching, in order to foster a better working environment for the performer or the coach (Knowles, Borrie & Telfers, 2005). All these factors combined elucidate the challenging role coaching can offer, and therefore re-iterates the importance of continually developing ones skill, expertise and knowledge set through Continuous Professional Development.



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