



The challenge of managing player development in a VUCA environment

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to summarise the key factors in managing player development in VUCA environments from the perspective of a sports federation. This complex process, which requires special attention and proper planning at each of its stages, must be supported by the foundations of proper management. The article summarises some of the contents related to the strategic pillar "towards sporting excellence" of the Argentine Tennis Association.

Key words: Management, leadership, context, performance, participation.

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INTRODUCTION

Managing is a constant challenge and creativity becomes the most genuine and effective tool we have. The VUCA and BANI environments that sports organisations will encounter on a daily basis require not only rapid adaptation, but also the personalisation of planning in order to maximise the potential of our athletes.

Opportunities are to be found in the same place as difficulties. To find them, we must first understand our environment.

Argentine Analysis: "The VUCA environment".

By environment we understand all those factors that condition the organisation's performance. A distinction can be made between the macro-environment, made up of a set of global factors such as policies, regulations, the economic situation or the exchange rate, and the micro-environment, which is made up of those factors that directly influence the organisation, such as competition, customers, and suppliers.

The great economic crisis of 2007 prompted the organisational world to start using a term that originated at the US War College to illustrate the context of the world after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The term VUCA, whose acronym translates as Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. Understanding this new world is not a problem, but VUCA environments are seen as an opportunity to develop strategies that can cope with stressful situations and turn them into assets for sports organisations.

Highlighting the most important points of the VUCA environment in Argentina, we can mention:

- Volatility: the constant and unpredictable changes in the exchange rate make budgeting difficult in all areas, but



specifically in those that directly involve the disposal of foreign currency. Therefore, the development of tenants is directly affected by changes in costs, with no clear pattern of behaviour.

- Uncertainty: changes in sport consumption habits and specifically in tennis are difficult to predict. In Argentina, the discipline was the first to return to sport and that brought with it a boom in practice at all ages.
- Complexity: tennis development has many interconnected parts, many influencing factors, and variables. At the same time, the development of competitions on national territory does not ensure that locals benefit from them.
- Ambiguity: Ambiguity scenarios are generally referred to when an organisation tries to enter an immature market or a mature market with a new product. In our case, the stakeholders' response to the change of a competitive matrix was totally uncertain.

THE SPORTS ECOSYSTEM IN ARGENTINA

In recent decades, sport in Argentina has been expressed as a phenomenon generated by the community itself, expressing the need for social integration, belonging to a group and recognition of a cultural identity. This socio-cultural trait has meant that the desire to excel on the international stage has surpassed the barriers of football and has imbued with this impetus countless other disciplines that have traditionally been neglected in Argentina in particular, and in the continent in general. We could mention recognised sporting achievements in basketball, rugby, hockey, handball, judo, swimming, cycling, volleyball, and tennis among many others.

In this ecosystem there are clubs with adequate infrastructure for development, coaches with great knowledge and international experience, quantity, and quality of athletes in various regions of the country, sponsors, private companies and government agencies involved in sports development.

This sporting ecosystem in our country generates a favourable environment and a huge opportunity for sporting development. One of our great challenges is to enhance this favourable environment to develop more quantity and quality of players in our country.

Finding opportunities in challenges

Peter Drucker (1984) argued that in times of difficulty it is not the problems but the opportunities that are most important. One of the enormous challenges in the development of tennis players is to rethink development strategies because of the high costs of a sporting career.

As we have defined, Argentina is in a moment of profound uncertainty, which the AAT has taken advantage of to implement a change in the competitive matrix. We are convinced that thinking about a new culture and competitions that adapt to the needs and possibilities of the players in the region also means working on the development of players.

TOWARDS SPORTING EXCELLENCE

One of the five strategic pillars of the Argentine Tennis Association is called "Towards Sporting Excellence" and aims to achieve a world-class sporting system, with a holistic approach, that maximises the potential of tennis players.

To achieve this goal, we have 4 plans in place:

1. The tennis pathway: Understanding and reformulating the stages of development and redesigning the categories accordingly.

How do we understand development and how does competition impact on each stage?

Creating environments conducive to transition

Schonborn (2001) argues the importance of long-term development to produce elite athletes. Several scientific studies have concluded that for an athlete to reach the elite level, he or she must train for eight to twelve years (Bloom, 1985; Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson and Charness, 1994) a specific and well organised training, competition and recovery regime will ensure a better development of the athlete

throughout his or her career. We understand development as a long-term period in which short-term shortcuts in a tennis player's preparation should be avoided. Competitions cannot be left out of this concept, so it is key to define the quantity and quality of competitions at each stage of an athlete's development.

Understanding competition as part of a tennis player's development will enable talented young players to reach their potential in time and ensure their long-term participation in the sport. In other words, it means ensuring that limited resources are used efficiently.

As Singer and Janelle (1999) justify, "in sport, competition serves as a quantitative mechanism for recognising excellence".

According to Bloom's studies (1985), competition evolves along the developmental stages. In the first stage, it is of little importance, and should primarily seek to provide positive experiences for young athletes, with the fun factor taking precedence over the performance factor. During the period of specialisation, competition, as well as becoming more important and more performance-oriented, becomes a key factor as an element of their training.

Create competitive environments conducive to transition

The transition stage from junior to professional is one of the most important stages of athlete development as it will determine the athlete's future. When an athlete develops or accesses the resources required to cope with the barriers and can cope with the demands of change, it is called a successful transition. Conversely, a critical transition occurs when the athlete is not able to cope with the demands and barriers that the situation presents. There are several reasons for a critical transition, for example: lack of resources and/or recurring barriers, inability to analyse a situation correctly and make a good decision based on the analysis, and low awareness of the demands in the ongoing transition (Stambulova, 2003; Stambulova & Alfermann, 2009).

One of our objectives is to create competitive environments that are conducive to a better transition.

Our competition formats in the transition to professionalism seek to develop Argentine players towards excellence, increasing their chances of competing in the country and the world. Thus, the team of professionals works to achieve the participation of our athletes in a variety of events that give money and points for various rankings, with a calendar that includes all regions of the country, encourages professional competition, and allows the addition of points of our players for the international ranking.

2. Laying the foundations: National Competence System

Competition Initiation Events

The initial stages present a simple competitive pathway for the children. This model starts with tennis festivals that allow their first experiences in play-oriented participatory events with cooperative games and skill challenges, and then gradually introduces oppositional formats in a constructive way (Figure 1).

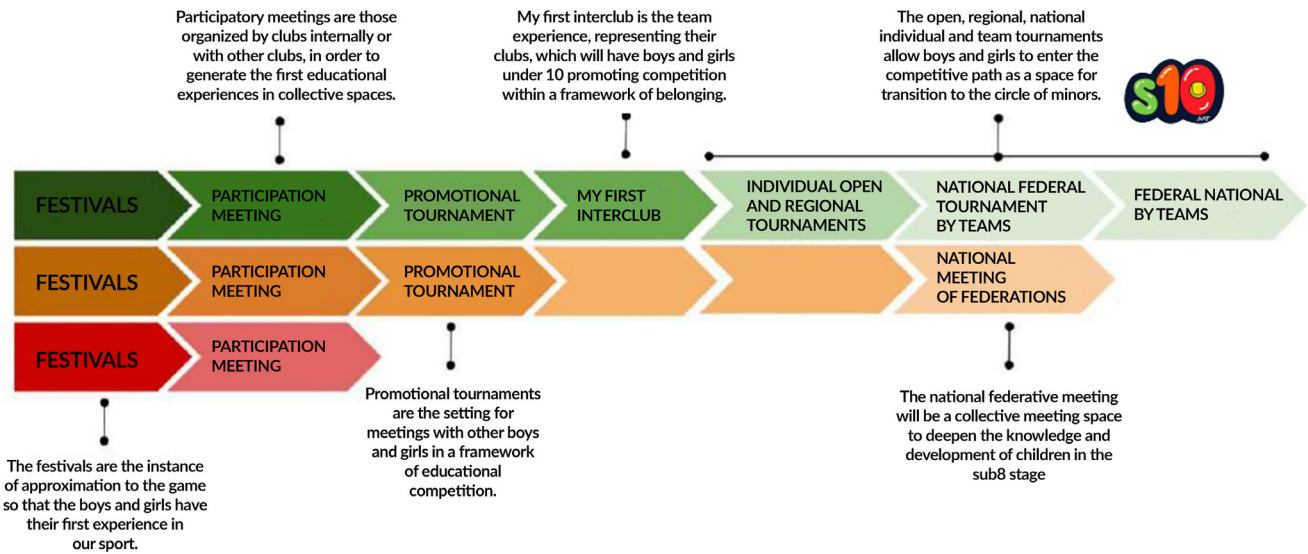


Figure 1. AAT competition initiation events.

The path of competition in the Juniors stages:

The categories defined for the competitions of the Circuito Argentino for minors are the following:

- Category U18 (Youth)
- U16 (Cadets) U14 (Juniors)
- U12 (Infants)
- U10 (Pre-Infants U10)
- U8 (Pre-Infants U8)

The tournaments will be classified into different types:

- International
- Nationals
- Regional
- Open

National competence system (Figure 2)

We live in an era of constant social, economic, and personal change in which sport cannot remain on the side-lines. The design of the competition structure must consider all these factors and address the need for tennis to be a sport for life, without losing sight of the vision of the organisation: **one Argentinean, one tennis player.**

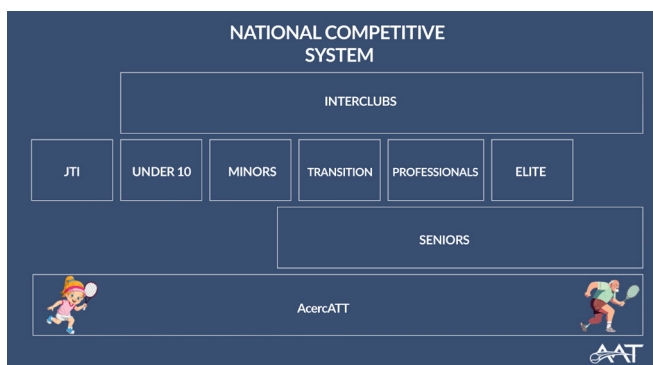


Figure 2. AAT National Competence System..

3. Competition at home. Changing the competitive matrix and development strategy.

Direct benefits of national competences

In recent years the economic situation in Argentina and in many South American countries has had a significant impact on the possibilities for players to participate in competitions outside the country. The high costs of travel, accommodation, meals and training expenses have made the planning of competitions more and more exhaustive. As a solution to these problems, we have designed a new competition structure that increases the number of tournaments from junior to professional in the country. This strategy not only has a positive influence on the economy of the players, but also indirectly favours their development. Among the most representative examples we can mention:

- Players can continue to train in their academies together with their entire staff.
- Affective and emotional containment by being close to their loved ones.
- Improvements in rest, health, and nutrition.
- Improvement in performance due to the addition of matches with international exposure.
- Access the possibility of an invitation to major tournaments.
- Obtaining ranking points without high financial cost.

4. Enhancing the ecosystem:

The ecosystem is like a chain made up of different links, each of which has a fundamental role in the development of the player. Private and public sports institutions are going through a profound change. Professionalising activities is key in this new era where the demands of the sporting environment, the institutions, and the athletes themselves require new strategies. Teamwork and leadership, among others, are key to carry out this evolution. In this context, the need to improve the professionalisation and training of people working in

sports development, who have the challenge of absorbing the experience of previous management to generate new ideas and/or improvements in the models of sports institutions, is increasingly evident.

The production of quality international events in Argentina generates a virtuous circle. Tennis is once again seen as an industry that generates numerous jobs, the possibility of full-time dedication not only for the players, the improvement of local infrastructure and the involvement of public-private investments that see the direct fruits of their disbursements in crowded stands, successful television broadcasts and young players climbing the international rankings.

CONCLUSIONS

Leadership from the leadership and professional teams at this time must be able to adapt to changes and guide towards the detection of opportunities. It is our job not to remain in the difficulties presented by the environment and to be able to generate a space in which athletes can reach their maximum potential.

The correct analysis of the environment together with innovative ideas will be the keys to success in the current global scenario, understanding success as the achievement of the National Federation's objectives.

The key is not to copy formulas, but to understand what the right strategy is to develop our players based on 1) the macro-environment, 2) the micro-environment and 3) our resources.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

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