



# Developing a young tennis player: A parents' guide.

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## ABSTRACT

The development process of a young tennis player is complex and can be challenging for any parent. There are many obstacles to overcome simultaneously and learning how to cope with these can be overwhelming. Goal setting and developing a strategy are essential components to the success of the player. Parents play pivotal roles in supporting the athlete throughout the development process. This article discusses the aforementioned aspects and is based on "The Tennis Parent's Bible" by Frank Giampaolo.

**Key words:** Parenting styles, Goal setting, Relationships, Motivation.

**Received:** 4 April 2014

**Accepted:** 3 July 2014

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## INTRODUCTION

Like gasoline and fire, educated parents can accelerate a child's success. In today's world, coaching has moved past the athletic playing field and into every aspect of life. A knowledgeable, educated primary tennis parent can be one of the best ways to contribute to a player's success. If the child's involvement or intention in tennis is different to that of the parent, or vice versa, it could lead to conflict or miscommunications. Try to establish the reasons why as a parent it is important that your child participates in tennis and communicate with them as to their aspirations.

The best players were motivated by very powerful forces. Find out what is motivating your child.

Common motivational forces may vary from:

1. Ensuring a better future
2. Having to keep up with older siblings
3. Seeing someone just like them succeed
4. An experienced coach who believes in them
5. Wanting to belong
6. Deep need for a better life
7. Fame

8. Fortune

9. Supportive parents

10. Love of the game One size does not fit all

### One size does not fit all

A common mistake to make as a tennis parent with experience in the game is to assume that the child's experience will emulate or reflect their own. This applies to coaching in the same way; it would be impossible for one to expect a player to play in the same style or with the same technique as their coach. A coach must be flexible with their teaching strategy and be ready to modify training sessions to the requirements of each player.

### Competition stage

During competition it is important to ensure open communication between parents and coaches otherwise there may be conflicting ideas. A parent must outline their expectations to a coach early on to prevent these issues from escalating and negatively impacting the player. Discussions surrounding the coaching philosophy is a good foundation to build a relationship with the parents. The needs of a player will develop and change throughout their career.

### Goal setting

When a player transitions from recreational play to match-play it is important that clearly established goals are set for long

term and short term periods. Goal setting and organising should be used as soon as your child enters into the competitive phase. After an event, plan on setting some goals to organise their upcoming lesson. Sit down with the child and review their completed match logs at plan on setting some goals to organise their upcoming lesson. Sit down with the child and review their completed match logs at an appropriate time. Being prepared and organised promotes a positive attitude. There are four sides to your youngster's game that need to be developed. Put in writing the four sides of development and identify a weakness that can be improved.

Technical: Slice backhand

Tactical: How to beat a moonballer / pusher

Movement / fitness: Develop core strength and stability

Emotional / focus: Practicing closing out 5-2 leads

Sit down with your child and discuss your expectations. This should include performance goals such as effort, time management, nutritional requirements, perseverance and work ethic versus having to win every event they are entered into. Review family philosophies and policies. Discuss the enforcement of such guidelines. Discuss how the goal is to eventually develop a self-reliant young adult.

At tournament sites we often hear parents and inexperienced coaches unknowingly sabotaging their player's upcoming performance by pulling their attention completely away from their performance goals. They do this by talking about the success of their child's peers. Look for the positive. Say something nice. It is important to acknowledge your child's effort. Once a month, throughout the course of your youngsters tennis career plan on sitting down and writing a letter stating how proud you are of them and place it on their bed at night.

### Developing a family philosophy

Team leaders, who are primarily tennis parents, must cultivate a positive family atmosphere to maximise success. An important step is to define the roles and styles of the parent.

At the competitive level, being a tennis parent is one of the most incredibly rewarding, yet most challenging adventures to undertake. Parents with a clear understanding of their own family's unique 'life philosophy' are more likely to avoid drama, stress and misunderstandings.

If the parent cannot control their own anxiety, asking a child to be mentally tough under adverse conditions destroys the positive messages they are trying to deliver. Tennis builds character. On a daily basis, encouraging the parents to display the same positive character traits developed through sports is

critical in solidifying these powerful life lessons. The family's philosophy is the basic beliefs, attitudes and moral compass of the group.

### EXAMPLE

#### Developing a personal philosophy

Developing a personal philosophy will help an individual, a family and children avoid unnecessary pressure, strain and tension. Having pre-set guidelines will assist in the development of the child's personal philosophy. It will also aid the parent in acquiring the right coaches through the different stages of the child's development.

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### PARENTING STYLES

Ten parental styles that are commonly demonstrated:

The Rocket Scientist: These parents often talk above their child's head, confusing their child more than they help.

The Athlete: These parents still view themselves as a competitive athlete. They often stretch more before their child's match than their child does.

The Submissive Victim: The child hides their frustration and becomes submissive.

The Developer: This parent is always pointing out life lessons in a positive way.

The Drill Sergeant: This parent makes all the decisions in dictator fashion. His battle cry is "Because I said so!"

The Judger: Judging and criticising is what this parent does best and most often. This parental style can spot 47 things wrong in 30 seconds and they believe they are helping.

The X Pro: "When I was top ranked..." is how most comments start with these parents.

The Negatron: These parents expect the worst in every possible situation.

The Jabber Jaw: Talks at the coach for 45 minutes of the child's one hour lesson and then later complains that there wasn't any real progress.

Houdini: This parenting type is known to drop off their child in the morning for their afternoon lesson and shows up at the club at the evening to pick them up.



## CONCLUSION

Young athletes will respond in either a positive or negative way depending on their guidance from parents and coaches. It is important to understand that life and the game of tennis is always in a state of evolution. Every generation changes it, tweaks it and improves it. The game's highest level is meant to be surpassed. Records are meant to be broken. Pay close attention to your child's progress and read between the lines. Encourage and praise them for their efforts. Acknowledge the struggle.

## REFERENCES

Giampaolo, F (2010) The Tennis Parent's Bible: A comprehensive survival guide to becoming a world class parent ( or coach)

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