



# Coach education systems in Europe: A competencies.

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## ABSTRACT

The following article outlines and compares coach education across Europe. It discusses trends towards coaching becoming a recognised profession in Europe. The article then compares job types within coaching with the competencies associated with those roles. In addition it looks at contact hours across different syllabi, and how they compare with recommended ITF syllabus load.

**Key words:** Coach education, Competencies, Cross-country comparison.

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the key elements of players' success is undoubtedly the quality of coaching that players receive (Duffy, Crespo, Petrovic, 2010). It can be suggested therefore, that quality coaching is perhaps one of the key reasons as to why European players are currently dominating the ATP, WTA as well as ITF junior rankings (see ITF, 2011; ATP, 2011; WTA, 2011)

At present 45 out of the 49 European nations are running their own coach education programmes in their respective countries. Twenty three countries have developed independent coaches' education programmes, whilst eleven have their own programmes based on the ITF syllabi and ten are using the courses organized by the ITF for educating coaches.

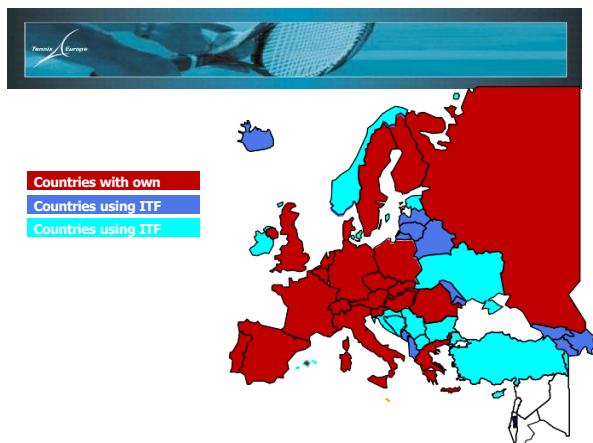


Figure 1. European nations by coach education programme.

## TOWARDS COACHING AS A PROFESSION

Since 2004, under the umbrella of the AEHESIS\* and ENSEE\*\* projects, the criteria and guidelines for coaches' education across different sports has been established. According to the Rio Major convention\*\*\* there are three standard occupations in sport: coaching beginners, intermediate and advanced players. (ENSSEE, 2008)

At present in Europe, there is a strong intention for defining coaching as a profession. The implication of this would be that the coaches' skills are defined and recognized by institutional authority with defined ethical standards and secured rights for all coaches (like social security etc.).

\* Aligning European Higher Education Structure In Sport

\*\* European Network of Sport Science, Education and Employment

\*\*\* Convention for the recognition of coaching competence and qualification

At the same time, when discussing coaching in tennis we should be aware that it includes volunteers, part-time and full-time paid coaches as well as parents.

By analysing the available data from 42 European countries we have identified 6 typical working places for coaches:

- coaching in clubs
- coaching in a (private) tennis school

- coaching in 'big' clubs
- coaching in regional centres
- coaching as National coaches
- working as Club directors

COACH COMPETENCIES AND JOB TYPE

Despite the variety of different labels used in different countries, it is possible to recognise a lot of similarities in coaches' competencies that are expected from coaches working in similar places of work with similar coaching tasks.

Figure 2. depicts that a club coach and a coach in a tennis school is expected to be able to work with beginners and young players.

*According to the ITF a beginner tennis player is defined as the one who has just been introduced to the game, and/or has a limited playing and competitive experience. (ITN 10-8)*

*An intermediate player is defined as the one who has certain playing and competitive experience and a regular and consistent level of play. (ITN 7-4)*

*An advanced player is defined as the one who has an extensive playing and competitive experience and a solid and proficient level of play. (ITN 3-1)*

Their main task is to promote the game as well as identify talented kids. Coaches in big clubs or regional centres should (in addition to working competently with beginner and intermediate players) be also able to work with intermediate players as well as performance players (18U) with the main task to develop players' performance. Finally, national coaches and club directors should be able to work with advanced juniors as well as high performance players- their main task can be defined as 'performance management'.

By comparing education programmes in different countries we may conclude that in principle, the programmes are aimed for educating coaches for standard occupations: coach of beginners (kids), intermediate players (14U talented/performance) and coaches of advanced players (high performance).

There are however differences across some countries. Within some syllabi there are 2 or even 3 courses (levels) aimed for educating coaches for one standard occupation. For example in Ireland education of coaches working with beginners and

kids is divided in 3 levels: assistant for 8U, assistant for 9U and Level 1 coach who is able to work with kids up to the 11 years of age.

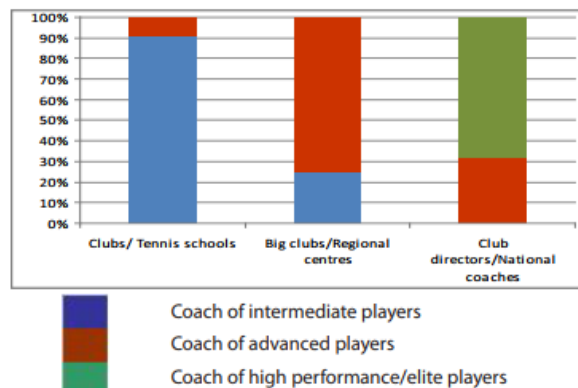


Figure 2. Place of work vs. ages of players that a coach should be able to work with (%).

Other examples include the Belgium system, which provides different courses for coaches working with intermediate players and players' up to 12 years of age. Also, the German system has two educational options for coaches working with high performance players: 'A licence' and 'Diploma coach' (for more details please see the European Coaches' Education Comparison chart; [www.tenniseurope.org/page.aspx?id=15946](http://www.tenniseurope.org/page.aspx?id=15946))

CONTACT HOURS

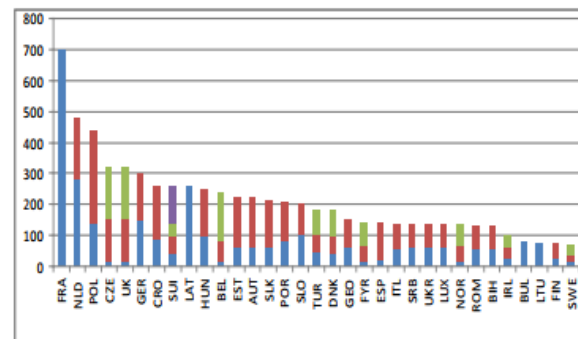
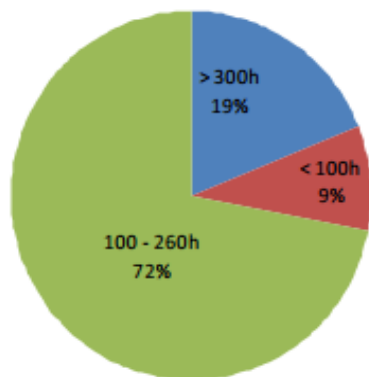


Figure 3. Contact hours across European nations for respective levels. In general, it can be said that the systems with a lower number of contact hours per Course (70 or less) tend to have more levels, whilst systems with a higher number of hours, for example France or Holland, have fewer levels.

Contact hours vs. independence

Independence in this article refers to coaching independently on court, without need for supervision. By comparing the teaching load (how many contact hours lead to independent tennis coaching) from different European countries we can see that in 10% of countries, coaches have to attend less than 100 contact hours with a tutor in order to work independently in a

club or tennis school. Only one country allows coaches to work independently with less than 74 hours contact (the minimum recommended by the ITF).



**Figure 4. Contact load leading to independent coaching (hrs).**

In 71% of the countries, coaches attend between 100 and 260 contact hours whilst in six countries (19%) the quota for independency is over 300 hours. Some variety in the number of hours can be connected with the difference in defining internship and dividing general science from 'tennis specific' content. In addition, some countries define intermediate players as club players, whilst in other countries intermediate players refer to young talented players until the age of 12 or even 14 years of age.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN COACH EDUCATION

Presented data indicate that across Europe there is agreement that on club level, coaches should be able to coach beginners, kids and intermediate players. Fewer similarities can be found in educating coaches for working with advanced and elite players as it relates to the national systems for developing performance players. At present in East Europe and the Balkan countries, players' development is predominantly driven by parents and private sponsors. In the countries like Germany, Belgium or Holland players' development is depending on the combination of the work done in clubs and regional/national centres. To take France as another example, it has an integrated system that includes clubs, leagues, regional and national centre in one pyramid structure.

In the majority of the CE systems, the levels of coaches' education are following players' development pathway from beginners to high performance players. Just a few national systems around the world are providing different education paths for coaches of participation and performance players (e.g., UK, Canada...).

European countries are continuously developing their coaches' education systems by implementing innovations like competency based education. Furthermore, we are seeing a

move toward integrating Sporting Universities and Federation based education programmes- which enables optimal inclusion of practical experience and scientific knowledge in the education process. This is very important as coaching expertise is the foundation for recognizing coaching as a profession by Government authorities and the broader community. Despite some differences in Coaches' education systems, generated by the size of the country, Federation structure and Governments' regulations, coaches need the same key competencies for planning, organizing and conducting practice and competitions for the same level of players.

Mobility of coaches is already common in Europe, especially between the members of European Union. At the same time, tennis is global sport and we are witnessing that more and more coaches are looking for working opportunities around the world, for example in China, Australia or the United States and Canada.

In order to facilitate easier movement of coaches around the world there is increasing need for establishing tools for recognizing coaching competencies and qualifications between the countries. In this regard, the standards established by the ITF are serving as the guidelines for defining key coaches' competencies for working with beginners, intermediate and advanced players as well as developing National coaches' education systems in general.

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