



Female tennis coaches in Hungary: far from elite tennis

Andrea Gál¹ & Katalin Orbán-Sebestyén²

¹Hungarian University of Sports Science, Department of Social Sciences; Hungarian Tennis Federation, member of Women's Committee. ²Hungarian University of Sports Science Doctoral School of Sports Sciences, Hungarian Tennis Federation, Head of Children's Tennis.

ABSTRACT

In the coaching profession, women's proportion is much lower than men's, and the multitude of reasons behind it have been analyzed by numerous scientific and professional forums. In the Hungarian context, research has paid relatively little attention to this area, although this is where male dominance is the most prevalent. This is also true for tennis, even if on the international stage, this is the sport where the struggle for the equal recognition of women began, and at present, ITF and WTA are actively engaged in promoting more balanced gender relations. In the Hungarian Tennis Federation (HTF), a Women's Committee was founded in 2020 and has been working towards the promotion of female competitors, managers, and coaches as well, aiming to increase the number of women and to promote their opportunities and progress. Our paper presents the results of empirical research, including (1) an online survey, carried out among women, working as tennis coaches (N1=94), with a focus on their professional progress, prestige, and financial remuneration. Since we did not have any data on the number of female coaches working in Hungarian tennis, it was not possible to take a representative sample of that population, so we tried to reach as many coaches as possible using the snowball sampling method. Additionally, to explore the opinion of employers of coaches, we conducted (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews with top competitors (N2=4), female club managers (N3=3), and the president of the Women's Committee, Andrea Temesvari, former Grand Slam winner in women doubles, WTA No. 7 player in 1984 (www.itftennis.com) who also works as a coach. The results show that female coaches mainly work in leisure and youth tennis, at the level of elite tennis it is uncharacteristic to find a female coach. When compared with men, they mainly sense a disadvantage in prestige, not financial remuneration, which can be explained by existing negative stereotypes concerning their professional competence.

Key words: tennis, female coaches, underrepresentation, gender equality.

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Corresponding author: Katalin Orbán-Sebestyén, kata.orban@sebestyen@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Even though women's sports have undergone intensive development since the mid-20th century, coaching is still a male-dominated area. Recent statistical data also indicate that the proportion of female coaches is especially low in elite sports; for example, at the 2020/21 Tokyo Olympic Games, only 13% of accredited coaches were women (<https://olympics.com>). The International Olympic Committee is committed to reducing this inequality through Gender Equalities Objectives 2021-2024 established by the Women Coach Working Group, to develop a set of concrete practical recommendations for the IOC to increase the number of female coaches at the Olympic Games in collaboration with IFs and NOCs. The involvement of NOCs is also important because country-specific data show similar inequalities: Robertson (2016) pointed out that in Germany, 10% of high-performance coaches and 13% of professional coaches are women, in Finland, two-thirds of head coaching roles are

taken by men in team sports. In the UK, the low proportion of female coaches has prompted sports policymakers to develop a program to help accelerate the transition of talented and ambitious female coaches to senior leadership roles.

We find little analysis regarding the proportion of female coaches in tennis (Ancalmo et al., 2023; Gasparetto et al., 2023). In a study by Probert and Crespo (2015), they reviewed what are the most relevant research papers related to tennis sociology, but in this, among the sub-themes, there is no reference to the study of female coaches. According to The International Tennis Federation, while 40% of players on the ITF World Tennis Tour are women, there are 5 times as many male tennis coaches working than there are women.

The WTA, one of the world's most recognizable and high-profile sports organizations was founded by Billie Jean King in 1973 on the principle of equal opportunity. In 2017 WTA established the Coach Program to professionalize and

recognize the important role of coaching on the Hologic WTA Tour. 5 years later, in 2022 they launched a new coaching initiative geared towards attracting, developing, and retaining female tennis coaches. The Coach Inclusion Program aims to break down barriers and provide opportunities for women looking to enter coaching at the professional level. According to Coaching news presented by the WTA website, the new program will focus on increasing the number of female coaches in the WTA by promoting professional and grassroots coaching as a compelling career choice to current and former female athletes and coaches, as well as developing targeted education mentorship and career guidance from other successful coaches (www.wtatennis.com).

The ITF Gender Equality in Tennis Committee intends to develop position statements on issues related to gender inequality in sport following the Gender Equality in Tennis Strategy called Advantage All. The main goal of this strategy is to develop and maintain tennis as an equal advantage sport - both on and off the court - which can serve as an inspirational role model for all Olympic and Paralympic sports (ITF, 2023).

The Hungarian Olympic Committee, following the IOC's gender equality efforts, has had a Women in Sport (more recently Gender Equality) Commission, whereas the Hungarian Tennis Federation (HTF) established a Women's Committee in 2020, headed by Andrea Temesvári, a former professional tennis player, French Open champion in doubles with Martina Navratilova in 1986. The Committee was involved in the survey of the ITF Advantage All program, designed to help national tennis federations identify where they stand in terms of Gender Equality and to provide guidance to identify where they stand in terms of Gender Equality and to guide further action.

LITERATURE REVIEW

But what barriers need to be removed to get more women coaches working in tennis? The reasons have been analyzed from different disciplinary perspectives (Kilty, 2006; Pfister, 2013; Kubayi et al., 2017; Jowett et al., 2022) that hinder women's career planning and progression as coaches in general. Quantitative and qualitative research suggests that the underrepresentation can be explained by the lower intention, motivation, and preference to coach, or the lower self-confidence, but also by those factors which lead to the higher intention to leave the profession compared to men (Cunningham et al., 2003; Sagas et al., 2006; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). These may include unequal gendered relations, gender stereotypes, and questioning of coaching competence, (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2011; Fielding-Lloyd & Mean, 2016; LaVoi et al., 2019; Rankin-Wright, 2015; Shaw & Allen, 2009), as well as tensions between female roles (Pfister, 2013), i.e. personal lives, relationships, social and family commitments must be sidelined to meet the expectations of being a coach and to prove themselves as women (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). In their study, Jowett et al. (2022) not only summarise the relevant literature on the topic but to describe the problems of women in coaching and put forward recommendations to solve them. They highlighted that cultural (openness and acceptance, safety and confidence), organizational (strategies and policies, education and training), contractual (types of contracts, salary), and health factors (work-life integration) are in the background of the underrepresentation of women in coaching. Of these, the issue of combining coaching with family life is highlighted by several studies (Bolorizadeh et al., 2013;



Sisjord et al., 2022), which conclude that this is a particular problem in sports where absence from the family over longer periods is a reality due to the series of competitions. Female coaches often express a feeling of guilt for staying away for weeks, which may also occur among their male colleagues, but with a lower frequency. In elite-level tennis, regular longer or shorter trips, depending on performance are an integral part of the work between coach and trainee.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In Hungary, no study has yet been carried out to analyze the situation of female coaches, nor has there been any data on the prevalence of women in the coaching profession in different areas of the sport. To enable the Women's Committee of the Hungarian Tennis Federation to work effectively for the promotion of gender equality, it is necessary to investigate the following:

- Q₁: How can the professional qualification of female tennis coaches be described and their distribution in the different areas of the sport?
- Q₂: How do they perceive their opportunities, and professional, moral, and financial standing compared to their male counterparts?
- Q₃: What individual and organizational factors can explain the current situation of female tennis coaches?

We supposed that the majority of female tennis coaches do not have a higher education (MSc, BA) degree in coaching, and are mainly active in the field of youth and recreational tennis, and least present in the field of elite tennis coaching. In their subjective judgment, their financial standing and prestige are lower than that of their male counterparts, and their professional competence in tennis is often questioned, except by coaches who are working in talent care systems or at the recreational level. One of the reasons behind this is that only a few women hold senior positions in sports clubs.

Our paper presents the results of an empirical research, including:

- (1) an online survey, carried out among 94 women, working as tennis coaches, with a focus on their professional progress, prestige, and financial remuneration, and
- (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews with top competitors, club managers, and the president of the Women's Committee, who also works as a coach.

In the quantitative part of the research (1), data were collected by a Qualtrics survey, whose content and face validity were confirmed by 10 women's coaches who had previously participated in a round-table discussion organized by the Women's Committee of the Hungarian Tennis Federation. Since we did not have any data on the number of female coaches working in Hungarian tennis, it was not possible to take a representative sample of that population, so we tried to reach as many coaches as possible using the snowball sampling method to expand the list of available respondents. The questionnaire contained 29 questions: Along with demographics, the items were related to coaching education and coaching experience, and a variety of items reflecting perceptions of women's coaches related to their male counterparts. We summarize and describe the main features of the dataset with descriptive statistics. In the second phase of the research (2) we also gathered qualitative data to get insight into the thoughts and opinions of other actors in female tennis. We interviewed two former top female tennis players and three club managers who were contacted by one of the researchers. The interviews were done online in January 2023, which lasted on average half an hour. The questions focused on the respondents' perceptions of female tennis coaches in Hungary. All respondents gave their consent that we could use the information from the interviews but without mentioning their names. Andrea Temesvari, president of the Women's Committee of the Hungarian Tennis Federation, and a former top player, who currently works as a coach, also was asked not just about the situation of female tennis coaches, but also the difficulties that they face within the workplace. Interviews were personally recorded by mobile phone with the permission of the interviewee, with supplementary notetaking. After all data had been collected, we analyzed them according to the research questions.

RESULTS

Female coaches on the Hungarian courts - demographic characteristics and working areas

In terms of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, only 24 of them are under 35 years old, which is related to the fact that they all played tennis actively before and started their coaching career afterward. At the same time, 13 coaches are over 65, presumably mainly in recreational tennis (Figure 1).

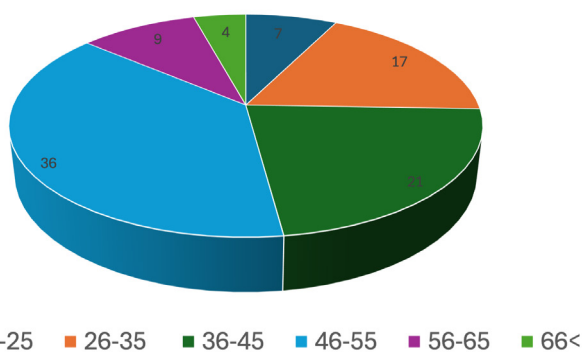


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by age.

74 respondents are married or in a relationship, which means that they also have to cope with the role of housewife and mother. The majority of respondents (63) have a tertiary education, but a low proportion have a sport-related degree.

Of these, 8 hold a BA, and 8 got an MA level tennis coaching qualification, indicating that only a few of the respondents hold the highest level of professional qualification currently available in Hungary. 25 respondents hold an intermediate coaching qualification, and 12 ladies have a tennis instructor qualification. Of the respondents, 23 are working as tennis coaches or instructors without a relevant qualification. However, of those who have a state-recognized diploma in tennis coaching, several also have an international coaching qualification (USPTR, WTA Pro Coaching) (Table 1)

Table 1 Professional qualification of respondents (frequency).

National qualification				
Master's degree (EQF* 7)	Bachelor's degree (EQF 6)	Higher National Diploma (EQF5)	Higher National Certificate (EQF4)	Coaching Licence issued by HTF
8	8	25	12	4

International qualification		
Professional Tennis Registry (PTR)	WTA Pro Coaching	Lawn Tennis Association (LTA)
12	1	1

Non-qualified
23

*According to the European Qualification Framework Level.

Only 15 of the 94 respondents indicated that they had no competitive background and had acquired their knowledge of the sport as recreational tennis players. Also, 15 of the respondents had played for the Hungarian national team and the same number had been part of the national squad in their junior age. In addition, 18 female coaches used to compete in the first division, while 31 of them competed in the second division or at a lower level (Figure 2).

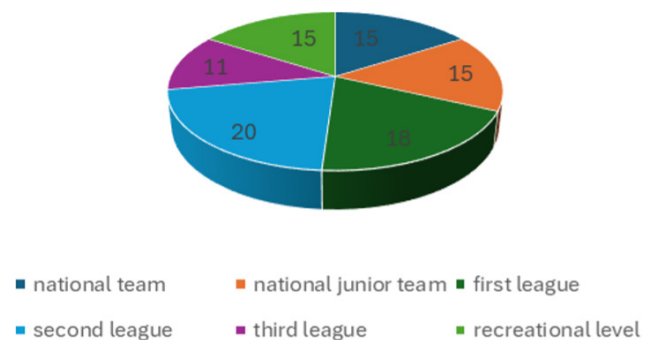


Figure 2. Highest level in respondent's tennis career.

More than half of the respondents (57) no longer compete, which may be related to the age distribution of the sample, but those who do still venture into competition compete in lower divisions, team championships, or senior tournaments.

The global phenomenon of gender imbalance among coaches working in high-level competitive tennis can also be strongly marked in Hungary, with only three of the 94 respondents working in adult elite sports. 40 women are coaches in recreational sports, while 26 are involved in youth coaching (Figure 1).

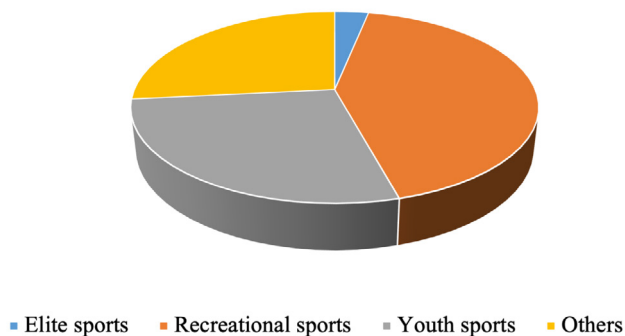


Figure 3. Highest level in respondent's tennis career.

Only a few are involved in school, university/college, or disabled sports, and two respondents work as qualified Play and Stay coaches. It is not surprising that only a quarter of the respondents work as permanent employees of the Hungarian Tennis Federation or a sports association, sometimes on a fixed-term contract.

Opportunities, moral and financial esteem: Are there any differences between genders?

We also intended to explore how female coaches perceive their opportunities, and professional, moral, and financial standing when compared to their male counterparts. Their answers essentially confirmed that their place is mainly in the field of youth coaching, where they enjoy the trust of parents even more than men, especially for children of lower ages. In addition, only four respondents disagreed with the statement that in adult competitive tennis, both sexes, but especially men, have more confidence in male coaches than in female ones. However, they typically do not feel disadvantaged in terms of moral prestige or financial remuneration, and 63 of the respondents also think that the development of women's tennis has improved the esteem in which women coaches are held. The most striking difference in this regard was that the statement according to which only a successful competitive record can give a coach credibility was agreed by more experts when referring to women, than related to men, especially at the elite tennis level.

We also wanted to enquire whether the respondents had seen themselves as role models when they were active tennis players, i.e. whether they had met or worked with a female coach. Most of the former competitors reported having done so, and 42 of them had a female coach along the way.

Internationally, it is also common to find that the parents of competitors have also been involved in tennis, either as former players or possibly as coaches. In our research, 50 out of 94 respondents indicated that they fit into the status of Tennis mom, because they had either previously helped or were currently helping their child's tennis career, even if not necessarily as a coach.

The following questions of the survey asked respondents to share their experiences of gender discrimination during their coaching career if they have any. Only 11 female coaches reported being negatively discriminated against during their careers, in all incidents, based on the otherwise more common perceived prejudice that they were less professionally capable than their male counterparts. Here we also explored the advocacy needs of women coaches and whether they seek professional cooperation with each other. The responses show that there is no uniform need for the Women's Committee of the Hungarian Tennis Federation, which was only known by slightly more than half of the female coaches, to strengthen the recognition of female tennis coaches by making their network more dynamic and by organizing professional programs.

We also wanted to explore if respondents have experienced other forms of gender bias, so we asked them to answer the following question: "Have you been in any way favored in your work as a tennis coach because you are a woman?" Only 15 of them reported such cases, most of them connected to youth tennis, where parents appreciated their nurturing attitude towards their children more, in comparison with their male counterparts. It indicates, that recognition is more related to feminine attributes than professional reasons.

Organizational factors behind under-representation

The information from the three female club managers confirmed what was received from the coaches: they were in the middle age bracket, their main income did not come from their club management work, and all three were "tennis moms". They were happy to have female coaches, although they complained about their low numbers - in the examined period, only one of them employed a female coach. On this, she reflected as follows:

"Usually there was always a female coach, but when she wasn't working it was because it was difficult to combine family life with tennis coaching... There are not many female tennis coaches in Hungary anyway, there should be more female coaches working full-time."

As one of them pointed out, she believes that the role of female coaches is particularly important in the field of youth training, because at the lower age groups, a sense of pedagogy and empathy are very important, and in her experience, women are better at this. In addition, all three said that they particularly enjoyed working with a female coach. Similar to the coaches examined, they did not experience negative gender discrimination in their work, but one of them expressed a strong opinion about this phenomenon in Hungarian sports:

"There is severe male dominance in sports leadership. The attitude of male sports leaders towards female sports leaders is not very fair. The professionalism of female sports leaders is challenged and questioned, and they are judged negatively, even if they have proven themselves. When forming an opinion, a female professional's opinion did not always carry the same weight as that of a male, so their ideas were mostly implemented, if they were by the male view."

Her findings are supported by the fact that in Hungary, the proportion of women at the top of sports federations is low, below 10%, and their presence is more noticeable in the position of secretary general, which is also true in tennis. The number of sports federations that have a women's committee is also negligible, which is why it is a major challenge to ensure that such committees function as a truly professional and advocacy forum. The chair of the Hungarian Tennis Federation's Women's Committee, former Grand Slam winner and world No. 7 Andrea Temesvari, is committed to this cause because, as our interview with her revealed, she is very keen to see a significant increase in the number of female coaches. She is currently working in this role herself, although in her former pro career, she has rarely met a female coach who prepared a competitive athlete, and it was even less characteristic of female coaches to travel to competitions with their trainees. She, as a mother of three herself, attributes this mainly to the fact that they are mostly only able to do so during the period between the end of their competitive careers and the time they become a mother. Being also a "tennis mom", she often accompanies her junior tennis player son to international competitions, which can make it difficult to coordinate with coaching duties. She, therefore, thinks it would be possible for a female coach not to travel with her players every time, as it is possible to provide a training partner, while the technological conditions are already in place to keep in touch with their trainees.

As a coach, she has repeatedly found that, despite her highly successful playing career, she has not necessarily been accepted as a coach, although she believes that a professional competitor needs the kind of authentic experience that only a former top player can provide. In addition, as a female coach, she has repeatedly found herself in a situation where her female trainees wanted to share with her their psychological and personal problems, which she felt they would not have opened up to male coaches. There may therefore be specific situations where the support of a female coach can be particularly useful. Similar to the female coaches surveyed, Andrea Temesvari considers the low proportion of female sports leaders in Hungary to be a major disadvantage in her sport, because she believes that it makes it more difficult to set conditions and expectations in the sports profession that would support female coaches.

Although we did not ask you about her role as a coach for athletes with disabilities during the in-depth interview, we think it is important to mention, that research shows that the proportion of female coaches in this coaching role is globally much higher than that of men and that the interviewee herself - Andrea Temesvari - is the coach of the internationally successful hearing impaired tennis player Gabor Mathe, who was the winner of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing competition at the 2023 Australian Open Tennis Championships.

CONCLUSION

The main findings of the questionnaire and interview-based research among female coaches and club managers working in Hungarian tennis can be summarised according to our research questions as follows:

- Few female coaches have a higher qualification in coaching and, although we do not have information on whether the same is true for men, it would be worthwhile

to encourage female tennis players who have finished their competitive careers to complement their practical knowledge with coaching education. In this sport, the time spent away from the field during an active career means that there are scarce opportunities to build a dual career. It gives particular importance to the cooperation agreement that was signed last year by the Hungarian University of Sports Science and the Hungarian Tennis Federation to support more elite tennis competitors – both male and female – in their coaching studies.

Women tennis coaches are mainly active in the recreational and junior training fields, with only a few making it to the top tennis level, which, according to elite players' opinion, is still a universal phenomenon in this sport. As the President Hungarian Tennis Federation's Women's Committee Andrea Temesvári stated, a positive enhancement can be perceived in the coach workforce around the world, nevertheless, women mostly can be part of the coaching process in the youth and recreational tennis, due to their feminine qualities, like understanding and empathy.

- Although numerous campaigns (<https://coach.ca>; ukcoaching.org) were launched to increase the proportion of female coaches in different sports, no such initiative has yet been organized in Hungary, nor is there any intention among those who are already coaches to set up an active professional community under the leadership of the Hungarian Tennis Federation's Women's Committee. Nevertheless, the high proportion of Tennis moms indicates that being in the sport functions as a transgenerational effect, but also that it can be an advantage for female coaches - either through easier time management or by reducing role tensions – if they have their children involved in their sport.

Despite the under-representation in a competitive field, female tennis coaches do not tend to experience negative gender bias, although they perceive male-dominated sports leadership to play a role in the low proportion of female club managers and coaches. In Hungary the situation is unfavorable in general; in the national sports federations and major sports clubs the proportion of women leaders is only around ten percent, and coaches are also underrepresented, particularly in elite sports (Földesi & Gál, 2019). In the highly competitive environment of tennis masculine traits, like authority and power get higher priority, which has an impact on women's chances in high-performance coaching. Besides, the combination of family life with coaching at the elite level also can be challenging, considering long competition seasons, especially far away from home. These may be the reason that many female coaches are satisfied to work in recreational tennis or are appreciated by colleagues and parents in youth tennis. Organizational matters, which refer to contracts, wages, and working conditions, also have a strong impact on the situation of female tennis coaches. As our research results show, when women's situation is compared with men's, they mainly sense a disadvantage in prestige, not financial remuneration, which can be explained by existing negative stereotypes concerning their professional competence. Only 23 of 94 respondents have a contract with a sports organization, working in part-time jobs, while most of the female coaches are independent, private entrepreneurs, who run a tennis coaching business.

SUMMARY

It is important to mention that after the Hungarian Olympic Committee and some major sports federations like the Hungarian Football Federation, the Hungarian Tennis Federation also considered it important to establish a Women's Committee to represent the interests of women in the sport (competitors, coaches, sports managers), which inspired us authors to carry out this study.

This step is the first milestone to raise awareness about the monitoring of the situation of women in sports, and gender differences and to highlight that in a male-dominated sporting environment, it is not always professionalism but in many cases gender stereotypes that decide (Walker & Boop, 2010).

This was demonstrated by the first conference on the 50th anniversary of the WTA, organized by the Women Committee (Hungarian Sports Science Association: Women in Hungarian Tennis, 27 April 2023. Hungarian House of Sport, Budapest), which featured several presentations not only on Hungarian women tennis coaches but also on the status of Hungarian women tennis players currently active in the international tennis elite, and which featured the names and video messages of former internationally renowned top players such as Judy Murray and Mary Pierce.

The success of the conference encouraged us, the authors, to produce this study and to draw attention to the need to address gender disparities properly, mainly because our study also highlighted the under-representation of Hungarian women coaches, which they believe is an effect of male-dominated sports leadership. Although the majority does not yet consider it important to monitor and address the role of female coaches in particular, we believe that both the conference and the presence of the ITF Women's Committee have started a process in the sport to raise awareness of the topicality of the issue.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

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