

AAT Community: growing participation based on information

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to synthesise the importance of information-based management, showing the key findings of a study conducted in Argentina by the ITF and the decisions taken accordingly to strengthen the action plans of the "AAT Community" programme, a strategic pillar of the Argentine Tennis Association that seeks to increase participation in this discipline, as part of the ITF's Global 30x30 strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

Argentina has shown sustained growth since 2019. According to the Association's records, there has been a 117% increase in tournament entries on its various circuits over the past five years, and women's participation in Argentine Tennis Association (AAT) competitions has increased by 108%. However, to continue the same positive development in all areas of Argentine tennis management, it is necessary to fully understand the current ecosystem.

To that end, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) conducted a nationally representative consumer behaviour study (YouGov, 2024) in Argentina in early 2024, administered by global market research firm YouGov and analysed by sports marketing agency Two Circles. The study revealed that 4.5 million people (aged 5+) played tennis in Argentina at least once in the last twelve months.

This positive interest in tennis and the new research available on the preferences of individual players and potential participants means that we have a unique opportunity to grow by basing our management on the accurate use of information.

INFORMATION: a strategic resource for innovation

Information is recognised as a strategic resource that can provide organisations with sustainable advantages. According to Davenport and Prusak (1998): "Successful organisations are those that manage information effectively and use it as a strategic resource for decision making and process innovation".

Informed decision-making relies on the ability of organisations to collect, analyse and interpret relevant data. According to Manyika et al. (2011): "Effective use of data and analytics can drive innovation, enabling organisations to develop products and services that better meet changing customer needs". Access to timely and accurate information facilitates



innovation and the ability of sports organisations to adapt to changes in the competitive environment.

Study findings and opportunities for growth

You Gov's behavioural research for ITF (2024) revealed that health and social enjoyment - over competitive reasons - are the main motivations for Argentines to choose tennis as a sport, with a potential audience of new and retired players (those who played previously but are not currently playing) cumulatively, representing an opportunity to double the current population of players interested in playing the sport.

If we talk about the potential market, the same research shows that there are around 9.2 million tennis players over 18 years old in Argentina (3.5 million current players + 2.2 million inactive players who would play again + 3.5 million people who have never played but want to).

60% of all current tennis players in Argentina are casual players (with a frequency of 1+ in the last 12 months) and 40% are regular players (with a frequency of 10+ times).

In addition, the report shows that 76% of casual tennis players want to play more, for this, "Finding players of a similar level" is a key factor, and the "World Tennis Number" will be a great tool to achieve this. This is also a great motivation for those who want to come back after a break to have a more enjoyable experience.

Based on the information provided by the study mentioned above, we can conclude that the strategy should concentrate on 5 pillars:

1. Increased Short-Term Growth Potential:
 - a. Inactive players: Efforts should focus on recent inactive players over the age of 25.
 - b. New Players: Efforts should focus on women over the age of 25 who have never had the opportunity to play tennis.
2. Best Chance of Conversion from Casual to Frequent Gamblers: Female casual gamblers aged 35-54 in Argentina are the age group most likely to want to gamble more frequently.
3. Greater Impact on Long-Term Growth: Efforts could be directed towards 18-24-year-olds who have never played tennis to engage them in the sport.
4. Greater Commercial Benefit: Frequent players in Argentina spend more than casual players, and most of them want to play more. Let's focus efforts on increasing the frequency and, therefore, the spending of female players.
5. Sustained growth: Rephrase: To sustain this growth, we must continue our work with the different children's programmes. Among today's players, the most common ages for initiation into the sport are from 11 to 17 years old.

STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY THE "AAT COMMUNITY"

In collaboration with the ITF, the strategic pillar "AAT Community" was launched in our country. The main objective is to bring the sport to as many people as possible, regardless of age, gender, or skill level.

Stakeholders: This global ITF commitment and the AAT commitment developed in this article to increase and sustain the number of tennis players can only be achieved with the participation of all stakeholders. Through the training of ambassadors and coaches, making them "key figures" of the future of tennis. With different trainings and incentives, they will take a more active role in the distribution of the programmes in their respective regions (Buszard et al., 2020).

Sense of Community: The choice of the name "AAT Community" is intended to encompass all the initiatives and social groups concerned, but also interprets a current demand from society for a sense of community, and the search for joint experiences that will ensure greater participation in leagues and events organised (Legg et al., 2017).

The AAT considers that strategies focused on community development, in addition to increasing and maintaining sports participation, can have a double function, which is to collaborate in the development of communities through sport, generating meeting contexts, models or local referents, etc. (Vail, 2007).

Communication: Also, part of the promotion strategy, in a second instance focused on "retention", is a mass communication plan, in large media and public advertising spaces, to install the characteristics of this sport that make it unique, such as its tradition, healthy competition, fun, and health. Based on a study on tennis players' behaviour at the University of Northern Colorado and North Carolina (Casper et al., 2007), the messages will be aimed at strengthening the "commitment" and "loyalty" of those who already play tennis but play it infrequently, or who knew it and stopped playing it. Here again, the information gathered in the YouGov survey (2024) is key to the communication direction, to choose the messages and words that generate the desired impact.

Programmes: The central tools for achieving the objectives are the recruitment, and tennis development programmes, both existing campaigns (Play and Stay, Tennis Xpress, Tennis10s) with a worldwide consensus of their effectiveness in bringing people closer to tennis (Buszard et al., 2020) and new customised tennis programmes and experiences tailored to the needs of new players, clubs and public spaces with characteristics specific to Argentina (Tennis in the Neighbourhoods, Acercaat, etc.).

Each of the initiatives is detailed below:

a) Junior Tennis Initiative (JTI)

The Youth Tennis Initiative is a global sports development strategy in partnership with the International Tennis Federation (ITF). Its main objective is to bring the sport closer to the community.

In our country, it is articulated through four different programmes:

- JugáTennis: Seeks to generate opportunities for access to sport.
- JTI Tour: Develops spaces for educational competitions, creating scenarios for the follow-up and development of children.
- Monitoring Poles: Generates development scenarios throughout the country for the detection and monitoring of talent in the U-8 and U-10 categories.
- School Tennis Courses: Trains a large number of educational agents.

b) Tennis in Schools

This programme will follow ITF guidelines and instructions regarding tennis in primary and secondary educational institutions. The experience of our neighbouring country, Brazil, will be imitated as far as possible, with appropriate adaptations to our culture and academic system.

The aim is mainly to target public schools, where more resources and space are allocated to physical education and sports classes. An insertion system is planned for those who show more interest after the first contact in school, to continue with classes through our Safety Net, using the Athlete Development Schools (EDAs) and Community Clubs. The latter will be institutions that currently have the discipline and, through a partnership with the Association, will provide scholarships to the children that the programme requires so that they can take part in the sporting activity free of charge.

c) Tennis in the Neighbourhoods

This programme has a clear mission: to make tennis a sport that is open and accessible to all. The AAT has already had experiences in this field in our country. Through the formalisation of this plan, it seeks to generate a permanent flow of low-income people who cannot afford lessons, tennis equipment, and court rentals in private clubs.

In addition, a support network is being developed through the Athlete Development Schools (EDAs) and Community Clubs.

d) Family Day

This competition format is designed to encourage the participation and integration of all players.

- Children will play in pairs with an accompanying adult.
- Children's categories will be divided by age groups and stages of sporting development. Adults will play against each other.
- At the end of the day, participation diplomas will be awarded and special prizes will be awarded to the winners.

e) A Day with the AAT

This programme aims to take the AAT brand and, in parallel, tennis as a sport, to places where it is not present. It proposes a day of tennis with the AAT professional teams of Initiation and Development. Both children and adults will be able to spend a day playing tennis, competing for prizes, and learning new concepts of the sport in a recreational and relaxed atmosphere.

f) Business Club

The main objective of this initiative is to generate a network of companies that are part of the Argentine tennis ecosystem. Organisations wishing to promote the values of tennis and combine them with their corporate culture will find in the Business Club an opportunity to do so.

Companies will be able to promote the healthy lifestyle of their employees by encouraging them to participate in physical activities. In addition, they will establish synergies with other companies from different sectors that will be of great value for the present and future of the business. Sport is an optimal space to make connections in a non-invasive way, and the AAT Business Club will provide the ideal setting for this to happen.

g) AcercAAT

AcercAAT is the recruitment and loyalty programme for members of the Argentine Tennis Association. It works on the generation of new sporting competitions and has the premise of "bringing" sport to places where the AAT has not yet reached.

The programme is based on four main pillars: AAT Americans, Tennis Xpress, AAT Intercountry, and Seniors G4 and G5. Each of these initiatives focuses on different aspects of the project. Tennis Xpress and the Americans focus on recruiting new tennis players, while Intercountry AAT and Seniors G4 and G5 aim to build loyalty among these potential new members.

CONCLUSION

The launch of "AAT Community" is the first specific initiative that will put the AAT on track towards its goal of increasing participation in Argentina by 1 million by 2030, to 5.5 million tennis players. However, reaching such an ambitious goal will only be possible with the commitment of all stakeholders.

That is why, in addition to all the sports strategies mentioned, the training of facilitators, the dissemination of information, and the massification of knowledge of sports will be key to strengthening the link between the ecosystem and encouraging everyone to make decisions with more tools and thus give them independence over their own management.

Making informed decisions is fundamental to achieving our goal. By creating flexible programmes, we will be efficient in adapting to the new consumption habits of the practitioners.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND FUNDING

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest and that they did not receive any funding to conduct this research.

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