

Female coaches' initiatives that drive the ITF Gender Equality Advantage All Strategy

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ABSTRACT

In 2021, the Development department of the International Tennis Federation (ITF) launched the Female Coaches Network (FCN) to drive the ITF's Advantage All Gender Equality Strategy in coaching. The FCN includes education initiatives to recruit, certify, and retain female coaches towards achieving the goal of having 30% of coaches globally being female by 2024. Since the launch of the FCN, there have been positive outcomes, with female coaches benefitting from ITF education initiatives to become more empowered in their roles, enhancing their certifications as well as having the opportunity to network with female coaches from different parts of the world. Seven (7) women have taken part in the Women in Sport High-Performance (WISH) programme supported by the IOC, 130 female coaches from around the world participated in the FCN webinar in 2021, and in 2022 that number increased to 179. At the ITF World Coaches Conference (WCC), in 2019, 24% of speakers were female, and in 2023, 38% of speakers were female. In addition, through the FCN, valuable data has been collected to serve as a baseline for further research, and to develop strategies, and programmes to attract and retain more women in tennis coaching.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) launched the Advantage All Gender Equality Strategy. The goal of the strategy is to develop and maintain tennis as an equal advantage sport which serves as an inspirational role model for all Olympic and Paralympic sports (International Tennis Federation, 2018). The strategy cuts across five (5) themes, illustrated in figure 1, and targets women in tennis across all the primary roles in the sport, being in leadership, officiating, players, and coaches.

In 2021 the International Tennis Federation (ITF) published the Global Tennis Report (GTR), which provides insight into the landscape of the sport globally with data collected from forty-one (41) selected National Associations (NAs), that have the most players globally. There are 87 million people that play tennis¹ and 41% of those are female (International Tennis Federation, 2021). In tennis coaching, according to the GTR, 22.3% of the 149,110 certified tennis coaches² are female³.

Although the distribution of males and females playing tennis is close to equal, there is an imbalance in terms of the number of women in tennis coaching. As part of the ITF Advantage All Gender Equality Strategy, the ITF Development department, undertook the responsibility to increase and retain women in tennis coaching, setting an ambitious goal to have 30% of coaches globally be female when the next edition of the GTR is published in late 2024.



To achieve this ambitious goal of having 30% of coaches globally being female by 2024, ITF developed and engaged in education initiatives to recruit, certify, and retain female coaches globally. These initiatives include.

1. Providing opportunities for female coaches to enhance their leadership skills,
2. Providing a platform for female coaches to network, discuss challenges, and share best practices,

3. Providing opportunities to become certified coaches and attain higher-level certifications,
4. Providing opportunities for the continuous professional development of female coaches, and
5. Collecting data to support the promotion of initiatives to recruit and retain more female coaches.

ITF EDUCATION INITIATIVES

1. Women in Sport High Performance Programme (WISH)

The ITF was also one of only six (6) International Federations (IFs) to take part in the pilot of the Women in Sport High-Performance (WISH) programme supported by Olympic Solidarity (OS) and coordinated by a team of specialists from the University of Hertfordshire (UK) (International Olympic Committee, 2022). Since the start of the programme in 2019, seven (7) female high-performance tennis coaches from five (5) Regional Associations (RAs) of the ITF have participated.

“The WISH program is a bespoke four-year, 21-month leadership blended programme designed to equip women to coach at elite levels – Olympic, world championship and in continental teams” (International Olympic Committee, 2022). The program has three key objectives: to further develop sport-specific skills knowledge and experience, to further develop leadership competencies or behaviours, and to develop confidence.

2. Female Coaches Network Webinars

In 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic had parts of the world under strict social and travel restrictions, ITF organized the 1st Female Coaches Network Webinar to gather female coaches from each ITF member National Association (NA),

under the topic “Opportunities and Resources for Female Coaches”. It was a rich educational opportunity with a strong and motivating message from various speakers, including ITF Board member Mary Pierce, world-renowned coach Judy Murray, as well as high-level female tennis coaches and experts from around the world, including 2023 Billie Jean King Cup-winning Captain, Heidi El Tarbakh from Canada. Over one hundred and thirty (130) female coaches attended.

In 2022 the approach of the webinar shifted from global to regional, intending to have successful regional female coaches sharing their business experience as tennis coaches with female colleagues from their region. Three webinars were organized based on three (3) languages (Spanish, English, French) and each had three experts sharing their business experience as female tennis coaches. One hundred and seventy-nine (179) female coaches attended, and the feedback received from the participants was very positive, highlighting that it opened their minds to new ideas and raised their confidence to find business opportunities in tennis coaching.

In 2023 a geographical approach was taken, to bring coaches from the same regions closer together to create or strengthen professional networks. ITF has ten (10) Development Officers, distributed in the regions of the world, Asia, Africa, Europe, Oceania, Central America and Caribbean, and South America. The ITF Development Officers organized a Female Coaches Network Webinar, and the objective was to have a representative from each National Association (NA) present three ideas that they will implement on “what can their National Association do to push to have more female coaches active and to support their professional development”. One hundred and forty-seven coaches participated, 82% of them female, from 81 NAs.

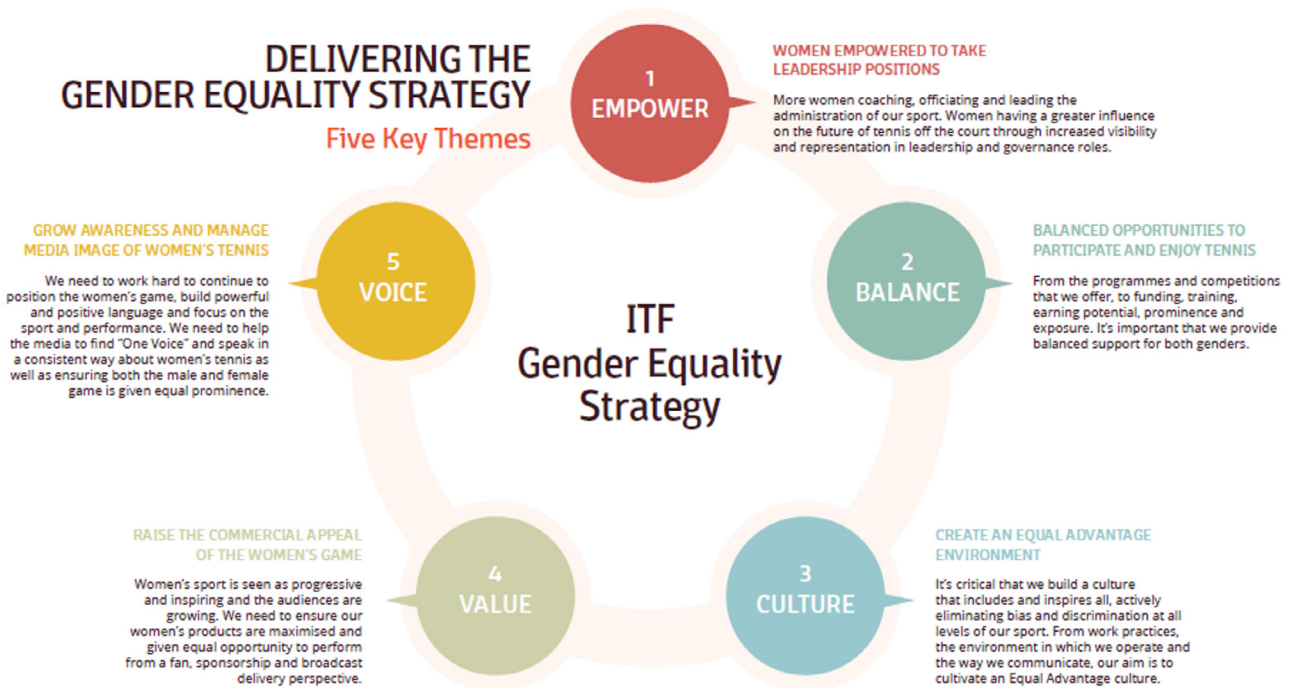


Figure 1. ITF Advantage All Gender Equality Strategy: Delivering the five key themes (International Tennis Federation, 2018).

3. ITF World Coaches Conferences (WCC) and ITF Regional Coaches Conferences (RCC)

Based on historical data from ITF Coaches Conferences where there was limited participation of female coaches and speakers, ITF set a goal to have at least 30% of speakers and 20% of attendees female. To attain this goal, the ITF deliberately provided education grants to active female coaches who are involved in the development and performance programs of their national associations to attend the conferences, as well as for more female speakers to be invited to present at the conference. These initiatives have seen the participation of female speakers at the ITF WCC grow from 24% at the 2019 conference held in Bangkok, Thailand, to 33% in 2021 in the Virtual Conference, and 38% at the 2023 WCC in Bogota, Colombia. Attendance of female coaches at these conferences also improved, where in 2019 13% of attendees were female, in 2021 it was 33%. Although the attendance dropped to 13% for the 2023 ITF WCC in Colombia, ITF has maintained the goal of having 20% of attendees being female at the 2024 ITF Regional Coaches Conferences (RCCs).

4. ITF Supported events and coaching courses

ITF in collaboration with Regional Associations (RAs) organizes Junior Team competitions globally, including the 12U Regional Team Competitions, the 14U World Junior Tennis Finals and regional qualifications, as well as the Junior Davis (DC) and Junior Billie Jean King (BJK) Cups finals and the regional qualifications for 16U players. In 2023 ITF collected data on the number of female captains that are appointed to national junior teams. Globally, 25% of captains at the 12U regional team competitions were female; 22% of captains were female at the regional qualification events of the 14U World Junior Tennis, and at the regional qualifiers of the Junior DC and Junior BJK Cups, 19% of captains were female. Based on this data, ITF has set a target to annually have 30% of the teams' captains at these events be female coaches, and to achieve this, national associations are encouraged and empowered to appoint active, competent, and qualified female coaches to lead junior teams, especially girls' teams. Through engagements with national associations on challenges they have in appointing more female coaches for national teams, it was identified that there are few suitably qualified⁴ and active female coaches for NAs to have a pool to select captains for junior teams, especially among developing nations.

4.1 ITF Coaching Scholarships

Since the early 1990s, ITF has provided support to national associations to deliver ITF certification courses, across four (4) levels, being, the Play Tennis (PT) course for coaches of beginner players, the ITF Coaching Beginner, and Intermediate Players (CBI/former level 1) course, the ITF Coaching Advanced Players (CAP/former level 2), and the ITF Coaching High-Performance Players (CHP) course. To increase the pool of suitably qualified female coaches, ITF has prioritized the empowerment of female coaches to attain ITF CAP and ITF CHP certifications. Through the support of Olympic Solidarity (OS), identified female coaches from different regions have benefited from ITF/OS scholarships to participate in the ITF CAP and CHP courses held annually in Valencia, Spain. From 2019 to 2024 a total of 54 female coaches from all regions of the world participated, 20 in the ITF CAP course and 34 in the ITF CHP course.

4.2 ITF Coaching Courses

In addition to providing scholarships to individual coaches, ITF and OS provide opportunities for more women⁵ to become certified tennis coaches and to upgrade their certifications, by supporting NAs to host coaching courses, to have a minimum of 30% of participants being female. In 2023, globally, female coaches made up 22% of participants at Play Tennis Courses, 29% of participants were female at CBI courses, 21% of participants were female coaches at CAP courses, 12% of participants were female coaches at CHP courses and 12% of participants at ITF Physical Conditioning courses were female coaches.

Given the ambitious targets presented to increase and retain female coaches in tennis, ITF will continue to build on the initiatives in place as well as enhance the continuous professional development opportunities available for female coaches. The 2024 ITF Regional Coaches Conferences will provide a platform for attending female coaches to network, for female speakers to share their experiences and knowledge, as well as for all female participants to learn and be empowered in their roles.

Albeit these efforts, there is a need for further research at the national level, regional level and globally on the experiences of women in tennis coaching. The research will provide valuable insight to guide the development of policies, strategies, and programmes that are effective and sustainable. Currently, research is available on women in tennis coaching, particularly examining barriers, hindrances, and support mechanisms. Examples are Pill. et al, 2023, who conducted a study examining the experiences of women in tennis coaching roles in Australia. In another study Jones. et al, 2022, explored female tennis coaches' career experiences, which was conducted in the United Kingdom.

EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMMES TO INCREASE AND RETAIN FEMALE COACHES

With regards to the implementation of programmes to support the careers and development of female tennis coaches, some National Associations are already implementing programmes to empower and capacitate female tennis coaches. Examples include Tennis Australia, which offers opportunities for women in coaching to network and enhance their education through their coach connect programme, scholarships offered to female tennis coaches, as well as access to courses and workshops. These opportunities are part of the Tennis Australia Women and Girls Strategy, which "has been developed to improve access and opportunities for women and girls to achieve gender equality in the sport (Tennis Australia, 2024).

Another successful programme is being implemented by the Argentina Tennis Federation (AAT), which includes several initiatives being, 1) increasing the number of female Play Tennis Tutors by organizing a Tutors course with all female participants, 2) increasing the number of female tutors for CBI and CAP coaching courses, 3) awarding scholarships for female coaches to participate in Certification courses, 4) maintaining the conversation on Advantage All and the importance of female coaches networking through virtual meetings and webinars, 5) enhanced data analysis to identify interests, needs, and level of female participation, 6) revision and reconstruction of educational material by adapting texts to be gender neutral, 7) development of equitable media content, and 8) the inclusion of 'Gender and Sport' within

the curriculum of AAT coaching courses, of which would be delivered through interactive workshops. AAT has set a goal to have increased participation of female coaches in their activities, where at their National Symposiums, AAT aims to maintain a minimum of 30% of presenters being female.

These initiatives by the AAT to improve the quantity and certifications of female coaches have proved over time to be effective. In 2018 their coaches' database included 222 coaches of which 18% were female, 6% higher than in 2017. Since the implementation of their program to increase female participation in coaching in 2019, the improvement is noticeable with a consistent 20% participation of female coaches in the education program between 2021 and 2023. Another achievement of their program is that at the 2023 National Coaches Symposium, female coaches made up 21% of the total attendance of 562 coaches.

ITF has recognized the efforts made by National Associations to promote gender equality, where some of these nations have been recognised through the ITF Advantage All (AA) Reward and Recognition programme (International Tennis Federation, 2024). Nations have been recognized for implementing projects that address inequality within leadership, coaching, and officiating. Particularly, Tennis New Zealand attained the bronze ITF Advantage All reward in 2023 for their efforts in developing and promoting female coaches. Tennis New Zealand (TNZ) offers scholarships to female tennis coaches to support their completion of the Tennis NZ Junior Development Coach qualification through the Tennis New Zealand Wahine Coaching Scholarship.

Scholarship recipients are appointed a female coaching mentor during the completion of their studies and have additional opportunities to access professional development in a range of tennis industry areas e.g. competition delivery, officiating, volunteer development, or performance coaching (Tennis New Zealand, 2024). Since 2021, TNZ has promoted, offered, and awarded the scholarship for each JDC (Junior Development Coaching) Course run, an average of 2 courses each year. This initiative has seen a greater number of women completing their JDC qualifications. As articulated by Tennis New Zealand, when applying for the ITF Advantage All Award, 'By decreasing the financial burden on these female coaches, we have enabled more women to feel comfortable stepping into the coaching pathways as well as making it more achievable for them to stay engaged around the demands of other life commitments.'

In addition to successful programmes in tennis, International Sport Governing Bodies, such as the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and World Rugby have developed specific strategies, that have led to initiatives being implemented to address the low involvement and retention of female coaches in their sports globally. Under the FIFA Women's Development Programme, National Associations have access to coach education scholarships and coach mentorship. The Coach Education scholarships aim to increase the number of qualified female coaches working in the game (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 2024) and the FIFA Coach Mentorship Programme will see experienced coaches from the women's game mentor a group of up-and-coming coaches from across the globe (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 2024).

World Rugby has developed a toolkit for national associations to implement programmes aimed at increasing and retaining female coaches in rugby. The toolkit covers the most crucial areas of coach education, development, and deployment, and is aimed at key leaders and decision-makers, high-performance directors and heads of coaching, as well as trainers and educators (World Rugby, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Leading into the next ITF Development cycle, ITF and tennis stakeholders can enhance the work being done through the Female Coaches Network, by developing and funding research, strategies, and programmes to attract more women to coaching, and most critically retain the human capital that has been developed through the years and surpass the 30% target that has been set to realize gender equality in tennis coaching. In addition, the Men as Allies campaign, in which ITF President David Haggerty has taken the lead in tennis, can be an effective tool to continue to promote in the tennis community, to create new pathways, or to open doors for more female coaches to develop professionally. The Men as Allies programme is a key element of the ITF Advantage All gender equality strategy, and ITF President Dave Haggerty has renewed his appeal for other male leaders and influencers in tennis to advocate for women in senior roles across leadership, coaching, and officiating (International Tennis Federation, 2024).

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.

¹A "tennis player" is an individual considered by a national association to have played tennis on at least one occasion. These individuals were a combination of licensed players, club members and tournament players (International Tennis Federation, 2021).

²A 'certified coach' is an individual who has successfully completed a tennis education certification course administered by a National Association or by the ITF (International Tennis Federation, 2021).

³'Female' refers to the identity of a person's sex based on their biology and physical characteristics.

⁴Coaches that have a minimum of an ITF Coaching Advanced Players (CAP) certification or equivalent, who then have the competences to teach tennis to intermediate and advanced players involved in competition. (International Tennis Federation, 2024)

⁵'Woman', plural 'Women' refers to an adult female person.

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