ABSTRACT
The Flemish Tennis Federation (VTV) has taken several steps to create a successful competition that is adapted to every level under 10. The competition is monitored closely to make improvement possible when necessary. By that, the number of children participating in competition has increased significantly in recent years.

INTRODUCTION
A lot of young children play tennis, but a minority participates in competition. However, competition can be very fun and also an important factor in the tennis development. By creating different formats and taking appropriate initiatives, the participation in competition can be positively influenced.

VTV competition structure under 10
The mission of VTV is to provide tennis for all levels and ages. Therefore VTV has developed a customized competition for everyone, also under 10. There are 3 official competition formats under 10: Kinder Toer, Volkswagen Tour and Interclub. The Interclub is a team competition that is played with the same match format as the Volkswagen Tour. The Kinder Toer and Volkswagen Tour are 2 individual tournament circuits with categories under 10. They target a different type of player:

1. Volkswagen Tour
Boys and girls play separately. The categories are divided in 2 series: series 1 focuses on the better players, series 2 is for everyone. The matches are played in a table with elimination. There is a Volkswagen Tour ranking that leads to the Masters at the end of the season, the Flemish Championship.

2. Kinder Toer
The series are the colors of the VTV education concept Kids Tennis. The children are aware of their color through the KidsTennis programme in the club. Kinder Toer is a mixed round robin competition where the age limits are not very strict. The results are not important and there is no ranking. If a player enters 5 times, he or she gets an invitation for the Kinder.
Managing the competition

It is important that a player enters the circuit adapted to his or her needs. At this age the experience of competition can determine the future participation. VTV has created a guiding table to make sure a player enters the right competition. This is for example the guideline for a 9 year old:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Court</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Ball</th>
<th>Age limits</th>
<th>Recommended age</th>
<th>Court</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Foam ball</td>
<td>10 and younger</td>
<td>5 and younger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Foam ball</td>
<td>12 and younger</td>
<td>7 and 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Soft ball</td>
<td>10 and younger</td>
<td>9 and 10, talented 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Transition ball</td>
<td>+10, +11, +12</td>
<td>10 and recreational 11, 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the last decade the participation in competition has increased a lot (Volkswagen Tour entries: 18,000 to 35,000). The success of Kim and Justine brought more people to tennis in Belgium, but it was important that the offer of tournaments was sufficient enough. By several initiatives benefiting the club, we made sure that clubs started to organise a tournament of the Volkswagen Tour and that it was interesting for players to enter.

The Kinder Toer has grown a lot in the last 3 years (Kinder Toer entries: 8,000 to 20,000). The most important change was the implementation of KidsTennis in the tournament circuit. By doing this, young players have the opportunity to play a competition that is linked to their education.

The strategy of VTV in managing the customized competition is to make sure that the different initiatives reinforce each other. Coaches education, Youth Fund, Marketing, Elite, regional support team... they all influence the competition and the different groups involved (trainers, kids, parent, clubs,...).

The competition is closely monitored and continuously adapted to the needs and demands of both the participants and organizers. A big advantage in Belgium is the number of clubs (tournaments) at a short distance, but it requires a lot of effort to ensure the quality of every tournament.

Ranking and Rating

VTV uses both a ranking and a rating system for the Volkswagen Tour. The ranking system is a cumulative system where players earn ranking points from R16. There is a ranking for each series in the Volkswagen Tour. The ranking is processed weekly and used to determine the seeds in the draws when players are rated equally. For the final ranking the best 8 singles results are taken into account (for series 1 also doubles results are included). The top 8 players in each series can participate in the Masters at the end of the season. The players in series 1 compete for the Flemish and the Belgium title.

The rating system is a year system, also used for the adult players. The rating takes into account all the matches played in official tournaments. If you win a match, you get a number of points according to your own rating in comparison with the rating of your opponent (if the opponent is 3 ratings and lower you don't receive points). If you lose, you only lose points when the rating of the opponent is equal or lower.

According to the total number of points at the end of the year, you receive a higher, lower or equal rating. If you go up, you can take several steps, but if you go down, you can only take one step at a time.

The rating system is used to divide the series of the Volkswagen Tour, so everyone can play at their own level and the matches are more balanced. Only half of the points can be earned in comparison to the adult competitions. The youth players can't
go up too fast so if they reach the adult competition, the rating has a correct value. In addition, the rating of the youth players is always reviewed by a committee, and if necessary adapted, so the differences and changes in the rating of youth players stay minimized. On top of this, players 10&under can only receive the lowest rating, unless the committee decides the ranking should be higher. These measures ensure that it is very exceptional that youth players go down in the rating system.

CONCLUSION

VTV has succeeded in getting more young children to enter a competition by offering a competition structure that is adapted to different type of players at that age. The initiatives taken to increase the participation are situated in different areas. One of the most important changes was the introduction of KidsTennis in the competition format.

REFERENCES

Jaarverslag 2009, Vlaamse Tennisvereniging