Player Welfare- ITF Initiatives to Enhance Safety and Welfare.

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ABSTRACT
The ITF, in partnership with National and Regional Associations, strives to provide players with a safe competitive environment, free of discrimination, in which all participants are treated with dignity and respect. We believe this to be vital for a player’s continued success, enjoyment and the development of the game. The Player Welfare programme was instigated by the ITF in 2007 as part of its commitment to player safety and welfare. The Player Welfare Policy was adopted in 2007 and the ITF appointed a Player Welfare Officer (the author, Kathy Martin) in 2009 as part of this programme.

Key words: Welfare, Abuse, Education.
Received: 29 January 2010.
Accepted: 3 March 2010.
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ITF INITIATIVES
These initiatives were implemented in response to recommendations from the 2006 Working Group on Player Safety, which was comprised of representatives from the ITF, the WTA Tour, professional tournaments and experts in sports psychology and elite sports and in response to the directive from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), issued in February 2007 to all International Sporting Authorities to review measures in place to prevent Sexual Harassment and Abuse within their respective sports.

The charter of the Working Group was twofold:

1. To examine athlete security in order to better understand existing and potential threats to athletes’ safety and wellbeing; and

2. To review current rules, athlete programmes and services and provide recommendations to aid in safeguarding and protecting players’ wellbeing where indicated.

THE WORKING GROUP FINDINGS
The Working Group reviewed the policies and practices of a number of international elite sporting organizations and the available peer-reviewed research relating to abuse prevention in sport. The research indicated that abuse does occur in sports, at all levels and that the prevalence is higher in elite sport. This abuse seriously damages an athlete’s physical and psychological health and can cause reduced performance and premature drop-out from sport (Brackenridge, 2001; Fasting, Brackenridge and Sundon Borgen, 2003; Leahy, 2001).

Abuse frequently occurs when there is a power relationship and/or where the abuser holds a position of trust, such as exists between a coach and an athlete, parent and athlete or adult and child. Abusers and their victims come from all cultures, classes, ethnic groups, religions, and levels of education. Abuse is usually secret and hidden and in the vast majority of cases, the abuser is within the athlete’s inner circle. The various types of abuse include:

Sexual: Any unwanted sexual activity, including sexual comments, touching or indecent exposure and forced or coerced sexual activity.

Verbal: Derogatory & humiliating names, yelling, offensive language

Economic: Unapproved control over the person’s finances or income

Emotional: Intimidation, repeated humiliation or criticism

Physical: Aggressive acts such as hitting or kicking; forced or excessive training, restricting an athlete’s access or consumption of food and drink.

Social: Isolation of the person from family and friends; monitoring or restricting their activities; and/or restricting their access to help or information.

Bullying: Bullying and intimidating behaviour can occur in person, or via e-mail, chat rooms, social network sites and text messaging.
All are unacceptable and all cause damage to an athlete's career and life.

The Working Group found that elite sports organizations internationally are responding to this situation by adopting clear guidelines about standards of behaviour, education of key stakeholders in the sport and specific procedures for prevention, support and complaint systems (Brackenridge, 2001; Australian Sports Commission, 2009; Sport England, 2003). In 2007, the IOC recognised the need for such programmes. It recommended that sports adopt abuse prevention strategies including codes of conduct, education, training, complaint and support systems and monitoring systems (International Olympic Committee, 2007).

The recommendations of the Working Group, together with a number of others following the ITF’s own review, were subsequently adopted. They include:

1. **PLAYER WELFARE POLICY**

   The Player Welfare Policy was implemented in 2007 and is located on the ITF websites: http://www.itftennis.com/womens/playerwelfare/playerwelfare.asp. It applies to all player support team members, such as any coach, manager, agent, fitness trainer, medical practitioner, family member, player guest or other similar associate of any player. It is a code of conduct, which describes clear standards of behaviour for coaches and others to promote a fair, respectful and lawful environment.

   The Policy includes the following areas:

   - Unfair/discriminatory conduct
   - Abuse of authority/abusive conduct
   - Sexual conduct, including harassment and abuse and a Hotel Room policy. The latter stipulates clear standards regarding sharing hotel rooms with minors, which is disallowed unless the adult is a relative of the child.
   - Criminal conduct
   - Anti-Doping
   - General conduct & requirements

   Anyone who is found to be in breach of the ITF Welfare Policy can be penalized. This can include denial of privileges or exclusion of the person in question from any or all ITF Tournaments, and other sanctions including monetary sanctions. Complete procedures for violations and appeals and management of complaints are described in the Policy.

2. **PLAYER WELFARE OFFICER**

   The role of the Player Welfare Officer is to:

   - Disseminate information and education programmes about abuse prevention to the ITF tennis community
   - Communicate the need for programmes at national as well as international level
   - Provide consistent guidance to the ITF on dealing with individual cases of harassment or abuse that complies with international best practices in athlete welfare
   - Establish and monitor support services for players
   - Monitor the implementation of the Welfare Policy and procedures and evaluate the impact of the same

3. **PLAYER SUPPORT SERVICES**

   The ITF has launched a 24-hour counselling telephone helpline service, available in many languages, for the benefit of players at ITF events. While it is still hoped that a player will be able to turn in the first instance to a familiar and trusted source for advice and guidance, the ITF recognises that this is not always possible and provides this vital emergency service for those in need. Supportive tips and articles are also available at Achieve Solutions, the health promotion website. This is a great resource for ITF players to learn more about how to manage commonly encountered stressors, which will ultimately assist them to achieve peak performance.

4. **EDUCATION**

   Education of all key tennis constituents, such as coaches, is crucial to prevent abuse and to facilitate a safe and respectful tennis environment. The ITF is taking a pro-active approach in the education area. To date, Player Welfare education includes:
Coaching & Sport Science Review

International Tennis Federation

- In-services for the ITF staff and all the Development Officers on player welfare matters and to introduce the Achieve Solutions website and telephone counselling services
- Update of the ITF Junior School module on Player Protection
- Presentation at the ITF Junior School, Wimbledon Championships, 2009
- Inclusion of Player Welfare information on the women’s and men’s circuits, wheelchair and juniors websites
- Presentation to the Worldwide Coaches’ Workshop in Valencia, Spain, 2009

Future education initiatives include providing a Player Welfare e-learning module on i-coach and providing Player Welfare information via the ITF Coaching and Development websites.

5. THE COACH’S ROLE AND WELFARE

If you witness or suspect that someone is being abused or a person is behaving against the Player Welfare Policy, it is your responsibility to share your concerns immediately to the ITF Coaching and Development Department, National Association or tournament personnel as applicable. In cases where a child’s welfare is involved, many adults are legally required to report to the relevant local authorities. Ultimately, everyone who coaches, plays or is involved in tennis in some way is responsible for the welfare of each other and for making the ITF tennis environment safer.

Coaches play a vital role in fostering a player’s on-court success. That success includes enhancing a player’s welfare and safety, which coaches can do with ethical and supportive behaviour that aims to nurture a player’s physical, mental and emotional growth.

As a coach, it is in your best interest to make smart, professional decisions to protect yourself and the players in your care. These include:

- Avoid Dual Relationships (where a personal and professional relationship co-exist, such as when the coach is also the boyfriend or girlfriend of a player, or the player’s parent). These relationships are complicated and can have many negative consequences. They are best avoided. Additionally, sexual relationships between coaches who are in a position of trust and their players, including with adult players above the age of majority, are against the ITF Code of Ethics for Coaches. The Coaches Code of Ethics can be downloaded from the ITF website at www.itftennis.com/coaching/practicalinfo/codeofethics.asp
- Respect the boundaries of your qualifications and experience. Refer to health practitioners for health advice, psychologists for mental skills; other coaches or fitness personnel for special areas of expertise.
- Avoid questionable practices & activities. For example, avoid giving massages to your players. This is known to be a high-risk situation where sexual abuse and harassment frequently occur. Avoid meeting players alone in hotel rooms; conduct your meetings, training sessions and other activities in view of others. Before using ANY physical contact in your coaching, always first ask permission, and do explain where you will touch the player and why.
- Be open to evaluation. Provide your training certificates, references and agree to be criminal record checked if asked. Reputable coaches are proud of their qualifications and welcome the opportunity to provide evidence of their skills.
- Abide by the Player Welfare Policy and the Coaches’ Code of Ethics. They are in place to set appropriate standards for all and to protect you.

REFERENCES


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