

TennisPro®



The International Magazine for PTR Tennis Teachers and Coaches

December 2023




PTR INTERNATIONAL
RACQUETS
CONFERENCE  

February 3rd to 11th 2024

In this issue

- Overcoming Career Plateaus for Your Staff
- Three Important Concepts for Tennis Teachers and Coaches
- Coaching High School Tennis
- Racquet Sports: Connecting Infrastructure with Programming 2024 and Beyond
- ...and more



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For the Record

PTR International Racquets Conference 2024: A New Horizon in Racquets Sports Education and Networking

The PTR International Racquets Conference (IRC) is back and ready to take the racquets sports community by storm at its new venue, the esteemed Saddlebrook Resort just outside Tampa, FL. Formerly known as the PTR International Tennis Symposium, the name change reflects an exciting expansion, now incorporating Padel, with plans to include platform tennis presentations in 2025.

World-Class Speakers and Expanded Options

This year's IRC boasts a world-class lineup of speakers, offering attendees an array of choices with three simultaneous presentations. The move from Hilton Head Island opens doors to more opportunities and options, aligning with Florida's status as the state with the largest number of PTR (and PPR) members.

Saddlebrook Resort: A Venue of Excellence

Saddlebrook Resort, a larger venue, ensures that all members can stay in one place, fostering a sense of community. The resort's outstanding amenities enhance the overall experience for attendees, making it an all-in-one destination for an enjoyable stay. For those seeking off-site adventures, Tampa offers a multitude of entertainment options, including sporting events, Busch Gardens, and vibrant nightlife.

Embracing Warmth, Networking, and Sunshine

Beyond education, the conference promises a richer social experience this year, emphasizing the crucial networking aspect of the PTR IRC. With the average high temperature in February hovering around a pleasant 74 degrees (23°C), attendees can enjoy on-court presentations in the sunshine, making the learning experience even more enjoyable.

Tampa International Airport: Seamless Connectivity

Tampa International Airport (TPA), ranked among the top international airports in the USA, facilitates easy access with almost 100 non-stop destinations across North America, Central America, the Caribbean, and Europe via 21 carriers, including various discount airlines. A mere 35-minute drive connects TPA to the welcoming doors of Saddlebrook Resort.



Dan Santorum
CEO/Executive Director

Dan Santorum

New Year's Resolution: Attend PTR IRC 2024

As the New Year approaches, make a resolution to attend the PTR International Racquets Conference, setting the stage for an unparalleled experience in racquets sports education and networking. The warm and friendly staff at Saddlebrook Resort eagerly await your arrival. Join us and continue "Making a World of Difference" in your student's tennis game in 2023!

For more information and to register, visit ptrtennis.org/international-racquets-conference.



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Thank you to Delaine Mast for her many years of service as a PTR Board Member.

Interviews were completed Dec. 6, 2023 by the Nominating Committee of Karl Hale (Chair), Lynne Rolley and Martin Van Daalen.



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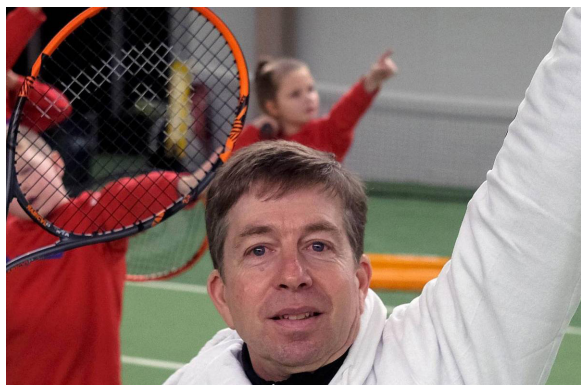


Member News



TENNIS JAMBOREE AT THE MARVIN TYLER TENNIS COURTS

There was rain - but Marvin Tyler, Eddie Gilmore, and many volunteers made it happen for the kids in Emporia, Virginia! "I love our PTR family and we will always represent the PTR the best way we can. I can't wait to see you in Saddlebrook!" Marvin (Photos by Terri Tyler)



INGO MAIER

Congratulations to PTR member, Ingo Maier, on recently completing the PTR Master of Tennis - Performance program!

GARY MELILLO

Earlier this year Gary Melillo (Broomfield, Colorado) was promoted to Head Tennis Coach for the Broomfield High School boys tennis team. Gary served as Assistant Varsity Coach for the Eagles in 2022. This past season Gary, along with Assistant Coach and PTR member Adrian Ciocci, guided the Eagles #1 singles player to the Colorado 5A (large school) state championship.

Gary has been a PTR member since 2003. He also serves as a tennis teaching professional at the Apex Tennis Center (Arvada, Colorado) where he has been on staff since 2010.

Member News



APP NEXT GEN SERIES

The APP Next Gen Series is a first-of-it's-kind development program designed for pickleball players between the ages of 16-23. In addition to the tournament series, the APP also launched the APP US Next Gen National Team, a competition and mentoring program that prepares the team's participants-made up of six men and six women-to represent the United States in future international and professional APP Tour competitions. Each of the three events in the 2023 series, all held at Chicken

N Pickle locations across the USA, offered \$15,000 in prize money but, more importantly, each event also incorporates educational seminars and on-court learning to assist the next generation of top American talent in achieving their goals of becoming professional pickleball players.

"I believe that by investing in the youth, we can help ensure the future success of the sport."

Ken Herrmann
Founder APP Tour



BRAD MINNS FEATURED IN A MOVIE

"Never Give Up" is available on DVD and Streaming as of December 1st! It is the inspirational and true story of PTR member, Brad Minns.



EXCELLENT TRAINING REAPS EXCELLENT REWARDS

Mahboob Khan is a 30-year member of PTR from Pakistan. He came to the States 30 years ago to get certified by Dennis Van der Meer himself at the Tennis University. Now, 30 years later, Mahboob's daughter Sarah is the #1 player in Pakistan and in September she was part of the Pakistan Tennis Team which participated in the Asian Games held in China.

Member News

Dear USTA Family,

Your shared drive and unwavering passion for tennis, combined with your innovative mindset and dedication to the growth of this magnificent sport, are truly remarkable. This is why I'm absolutely thrilled to announce that applications for the 2025-2026 Board of Directors and Nominating Committee are now open, and we're eagerly seeking individuals with your level of commitment and enthusiasm to apply.

Whether you're considering applying for the Board of Directors, the Nominating Committee, or both, these positions are of paramount importance in fulfilling our mission of promoting, developing, and growing the sport of tennis. The Nominating Committee welcomes and encourages individuals from all backgrounds and experiences to apply. For a more comprehensive understanding of these roles, we've provided a short and informative video that can be found [here](#).

Mark your calendars - the application deadline is set for midnight EST on February 1, 2024. We kindly remind all applicants that submissions received after this date will be unable to be considered, so we urge you to submit your applications well in advance.

Take the step to shape the future of the USTA by submitting your application at usta.com/nominatingcommittee. We extend our heartfelt thanks in advance for your dedication and the time you're investing in this important endeavor.

The Nominating Committee is eagerly anticipating the opportunity to review your applications. Together, let's make tennis even greater!

Lawrence Washington

Chair - USTA Nominating Committee

E: lawrence.washington@nominating.usta.com

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Overcoming Career Plateaus for Your Staff

by Len Simard

Identifying and creating awareness of the impact of career plateaus – for both the individual and the organization – highlights the need for intervention and support. The identification of root causes and their effects on your staff clarifies these plateaus, making the strategies offered here actionable and relevant. From structured skill development programs to fostering a supportive work culture, this resource will provide a realistic approach to overcoming these career hurdles for your staff and nurture professional growth while maintaining the industry's vibrancy.

Identifying a career plateau

Often during a teaching professional's tenure, they encounter periods where their career progression seems to reach a standstill. These periods, known as career plateaus, significantly impact not only individual job performance but also the morale and productivity of fellow teammates and the club. Understanding and supporting employees through these plateaus is critical to their success and ensuring sustained growth for the club's success and the profession.



Identifying career plateaus within your club is critical. The typical warning signs of a career plateau often include boredom, frustration, or disengagement from the job. The impact is vast, and a career plateau for one may impact others.

Unveiling the root causes of career plateaus Professionals within the racquet industry may encounter plateaus when the following is present:

- **Repetitive tasks and lack of challenge:** Certain roles might entail repetitive tasks without providing avenues for professional growth or challenges that can stimulate employees' skill development.
- **Limited opportunities for advancement:** In smaller companies or those with fewer managerial positions, there might be a scarcity of upward mobility, resulting in a perceived lack of opportunities for career progression.
- **Burnout and stress:** Sustained stress or overwhelming workloads can lead to burnout, causing professionals to feel drained and unable to explore new facets or responsibilities within their roles.

- **Learning stagnation:** A shortage of learning opportunities or intrinsic motivation to explore new skills or knowledge areas might contribute to feelings of stagnation and disengagement.

- **Personal constraints impacting performance:** Personal issues such as health concerns or challenging family situations can disrupt an employee's focus and impede their ability to advance professionally.

Employers must address career plateaus

While career plateaus might appear as individual challenges, the impact on club culture is far-reaching. Consider an environment where employers proactively and continuously prioritize talent development:

- **Enhanced retention:** By providing avenues for career advancement, organizations can increase employee loyalty and reduce turnover rates.
- **Elevated job satisfaction:** Empowering employees to grow within the company leads to greater satisfaction, fostering a motivated and engaged workforce.

- **Positive Work Environment:** Demonstrating a commitment to employee growth creates a positive workplace culture, attracting and retaining top talent.
- **Skill enrichment for competitiveness:** Encouraging skill diversification and advancement ensures a well-equipped staff that can keep the club competitive and the membership content.
- **Internal talent pool development:** Employees with continually evolving skill sets can seamlessly transition into new roles, creating a robust internal talent pipeline.
- **Sustained productivity and excellence:** Addressing plateaus ensures that employees maintain high productivity levels and deliver consistent performance that contributes to the member experience.

Empowering employees through career plateaus

Understanding the impact of addressing career plateaus stretches beyond just the individual. Consider the following tactics to empower and support professionals in the racquet industry:

- **Structured skill development programs:** Implement comprehensive training initiatives encompassing internal seminars, online organizational courses, on-the-job mentoring, and educational reimbursements, nurturing continual skill development and knowledge. Professionals likely want to understand

and develop in all areas of racquet sports.

- **Career path mapping:** Meet with employees regularly to chart career paths within the club or industry, with clear and viable options documented, including the typical timelines for progression into that role. Do you have an organizational chart that is accessible to all teammates? Moreover, is there an understanding of the competencies required to reach these positions?
- **Goal-oriented approaches:** Facilitate goal setting aligned with individual aspirations and organizational objectives, encouraging certifications or skill acquisition to prepare for future roles. Coursework and accreditation through the University of Florida's Director of Racquet Sports (DORS) program, as an example, is a viable option for individuals looking to advance to the Director of Racquets position.
- **Expanded role responsibilities:** Offer opportunities for enhanced roles outside of their standard job description. This will bolster employee engagement and satisfaction. Have these individuals cross-train with adult and junior programs and across competitive and social opportunities.
- **Supportive work culture:** Extend empathetic support for personal issues impacting job performance, offering flexible work arrangements or leaves of absence, fostering a compassionate and understanding work environment.

S/N	MOTIVATING FACTOR	EMPLOYEE RANKING
1	Good Working Conditions	3
2	Feeling "In" on Things	6
3	Job Security	7
4	Promotion and Growth	4
5	Good Pay	5
6	Company Loyalty to Workers	8
7	Tactful Discipline	10
8	Appreciation of Work	1
9	Sympathetic Help with Personal Problems	9
10	Interesting Work	2

We all see the effects of how tough it is to hire for our club -- from staff professionals, front desk, pro shop and maintenance. We desperately need new hospitality talent to enter the industry, and unless we have a supportive network within clubs that show

compassion, demonstrate appreciation on the job, and provide a spectrum of interesting work, we will continue to lose the battle to other industries and professions.



Len Simard,
 Kopplin, Kuebler and Wallace
 Search and Consulting Executive
 PTR & USPTA Master Professional

Len Simard oversees all racquet sports, fitness, wellness, and GM/COO searches for the firm's club clients. Len is an industry leader in racquet facility consulting, performing evaluations, compensation reviews and providing solutions to all types of racquets facilities and organizations throughout the Country. Len has been directing, teaching, and coaching at well-respected country clubs throughout North America for more than 40 years and is regarded as one the country's leading racquets directors and managers. Len has hired, trained, and worked with hundreds of professionals in his career and is extremely proud that more than 50 of his former assistants are leading prominent clubs in the U.S. and Canada.



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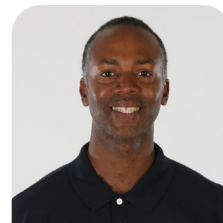
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- F&B operation within the Racquets department; co-existing with your fellow senior staff department heads
- How to stay up to date with industry trends for the DOR
- How to hire a world class staff in the private club industry, and then how to insure success. Then how to organize your staffing model to today's best practices.
- How to best allocate funds for your racquet department.
- What a General Manager wishes the DOR would never forget! (with guest Gm, Scott Fairbairn, CCM, CCE)

Ensuring the Future: Building Career Pathways for Racquet Sports Professionals to Promote Growth and Leadership Succession

by Simon Gale

As aficionados of racquet sports, we know the game extends far beyond the grandeur of major tournaments; its true essence lies in the heart of grassroots initiatives, nurtured by dedicated teaching professionals. Over the past two years, I have conducted presentations focusing on reimagining the coach pathway and surveyed more than 300 teaching professionals. Our findings crystallize three pivotal challenges hindering our profession's appeal and sustainability: the exhaustive 6 or 7-day work weeks, stagnant compensation, and limited career advancement opportunities.

Reimagining the Coaching Pathway: A Strategic Imperative

The revelation from our study is clear: a well-defined career pathway for racquet sports professionals is not just a perk—it's a necessity. Such a framework can significantly curb turnover, magnetize new talent, and catalyze industry growth. Coaching, with its amalgam of technical prowess, communicative finesse, and profound understanding of players' motivations, should not be a transient occupation plagued by high turnover.



Instead, we envision a future where racquet sports coaching is a fulfilling, long-term career choice.

Bridging the Gap: Fresh Perspectives and Sustainable Schedules

The current state of our industry, led commendably by veterans, calls for an infusion of fresh perspectives and innovative methodologies. A well-structured career pathway ensures the seamless integration of youthful vigor while safeguarding the invaluable experience of seasoned coaches. Addressing the grueling work week that contributes to burnout and turnover is also crucial. We propose a career model that harmonizes professional growth with personal well-being, ensuring coaches' passion for the sport remains undimmed.

The Roadmap to a Fulfilling Career

The allure of a coaching career often wanes in the face of long hours, lackluster benefits, and ambiguous growth trajectories. By

presenting a clear developmental roadmap, we can rekindle interest in coaching careers. This roadmap should highlight opportunities for progression from grassroots levels to leadership positions, attracting innovative minds to the sport.

Compensation and Benefits: The Cornerstones of Satisfaction

An often-overlooked aspect in coaching is a transparent compensation structure. We advocate for a model where coaches can clearly see the potential for financial progression, thereby incentivizing skilled professionals to embrace coaching as a viable career. Additionally, in an era where benefits are a norm in many sectors, their absence in racquet sports coaching is a glaring gap. A comprehensive benefits package, including health insurance and retirement plans, will not only attract top talent but also instill a sense of security and commitment.



Diversity and Inclusion: The Bedrock of Evolution

Coaching has, historically, lacked diversity. The industry must actively address this issue by creating pathways that encourage a more inclusive and representative coaching community. To break this mold, we must actively cultivate diversity and inclusivity within the coaching community. Initiatives like mentorship programs, scholarships, and diverse leadership role models are pivotal in making the coaching profession accessible and appealing to a broader demographic.

Fostering Future Leaders: The Succession Strategy

A clear career pathway transcends individual achievement; it's about cultivating the next generation of industry leaders. Identifying and nurturing young talent is vital for a seamless transition in leadership, ensuring the continuity and evolution of high-quality coaching. Structured mentorship programs, where the wisdom of experienced coaches is passed down, are key to nurturing successful racquet directors.

Continual Growth: The Lifeline of Coaching Excellence

Professional development should be an ongoing journey for coaches, involving certifications, advanced degrees, or specialized training in leadership, sports psychology, or biomechanics. This commitment to continuous learning enriches individual skill sets and collectively uplifts coaching standards across the industry.

The growth trajectory of the racquet sports industry hinges on the caliber of coaching at every level. A definitive career pathway is not just a blueprint for individual success; it's the cornerstone of a thriving, sustainable industry. By mitigating burnout, attracting fresh talent, and fostering continuous professional development, we set the stage for a brighter future in coaching and racquet sports. As we invest in our coaching professionals, we are, in essence, investing in the success of the players they mentor and the communities they enrich.



Simon Gale is the Director of Racquet Sports at the USTA National Campus in Lake Nona, Florida. He has implemented a 5 day work week for all full time professionals and built a clearly defined coach pathway, compensation tiers and professional development plans. He is a frequent speaker at USTA, PTR and USPTA conventions and is the co-host of the Racquet Fuel podcast.



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Pickleball Revolution: From Backyard Fun to National Phenomenon

By Sarah Ansboury

Charting the Explosive Growth of America's Fastest-Growing Sport and Its Impact on Players, Coaches, and the Racquet Industry

Today in the United States you can go pretty much anywhere and be able to pick up a game of pickleball. There are Facebook pages, apps and websites dedicated to finding a local spot to play where players traveling or locally can show up and play socially or competitively. Most places in the world will now offer somewhere to play.

In 1965 in Bainbridge Island, WA pickleball was invented. We did not start hearing about

it until about 2018/19 with a big explosion post-COVID and now we hear about it everywhere. Families were able to set up courts in their driveways or backyards and be active. It is a sport accessible to everyone.

I came across pickleball earlier than most, in 2014, because I was teaching tennis at a club in Vancouver, WA. Groups there were very organized and active, where across the country people still had not heard of



the sport. The local pickleball club played 3 times a week on the other side of my club on the basketball courts. I was not very interested, to be honest. The pickleball club President convinced me to play in their local tournament at my own club. I had no idea how to score or much about positioning, but I made my way through. I was still competing in tennis at the time at league level and 30 plus. I was traveling throughout the country to play in draws with an average of less than ten players. In my first pickleball tournament there were huge draws, then the next and the next. Suddenly, I was going to Utah and Arizona to play in pickleball tournaments. There was no prize money and no sponsorships yet.

As a coach, I wanted to know how I could teach other people. Where was the education and structure that we followed? I found out there was none. Most people teaching pickleball were teaching things they had been doing for years. When I started playing, others like me also started. Suddenly, you were seeing things like a two handed backhand and swinging volleys. Many players did not like some of the changes, but like all sports we must evolve. The more we all competed, the need for different levels became apparent. Paddle companies started sponsoring us to play tournaments, some tournaments started offering prize money.

In 2016 I got an RV and travelled the country playing pickleball tournaments and teaching clinics. I wanted to see how pickleball was being introduced to the rest of the country. The more east I travelled the less pickleball I saw. So, I taught clinics at parks, schools, churches, bingo halls, anywhere they could put courts. Most courts at the time were basketball courts. Many tennis clubs and tennis professionals were like me in the

beginning, not seeing the purpose of the sport and maybe looking down on it. The local club had a lot of "older" players, but the more I played tournaments the more I saw more players like me.

Coming from the tennis industry I knew that one thing that would help pickleball the most was having companies related to tennis pushing the sport. This led me to signing with HEAD for their pickleball launch. I played for HEAD tennis and HEAD pickleball made sense. We were able to reach players on a different level with a brand that tennis players recognized. This led to PTR reaching out to me about launching pickleball education. I had worked before with smaller organizations creating pickleball education, but I did not feel that was the right direction. For 2 years of my traveling the country, I was writing what our education might look like when I found a place to put it.

My mother is a tennis coach, and I grew up going to tennis conferences. I always knew the value of education and access to it. Working with PTR to launch PPR made sense. An organization that has always valued the same was key. August of 2018 as our first PPR workshop and I travelled across the country that first year hosting about 100, certifying coaches and working with facilities on adding pickleball to their current programming. At this time, I took the position of Director of Pickleball at Palmetto Dunes in Hilton Head, SC. At the time there were 8 designated pickleball courts. Knowing from my travels what was lacking as well as working in the pickleball industry, it was important to have a place that could show the rest of the country what was possible in this industry. I started both PPR and Palmetto Dunes at the end of May 2018. By November, we had converted

two clay tennis courts to 8 lighted pickleball courts. We added programming similar to what we know works on the tennis side as well as organized round robins. We paid for those courts in 6 months. Within a year taking two more clay courts and adding 8 more pickleball courts, the daily round robin can hold 96 participants. Now Palmetto Dunes is one of the top pickleball resorts in this country. With multiple daily clinics, round robins, lessons and events.

Many people see this growth in numbers and want to be a part of it. There are some important factors to being successful:

PROGRAMMING

Many facilities will start with an intro to pickleball, but what happens next? They will introduce the sport to players either coming from other racquet sports, golf or nothing at all. Without the next step after pickleball 101, players will go somewhere else. Filling the needs of members or guests to retain those players... Just like other racquet sports.

STAFFING

Coaches that can teach pickleball and not just entry level. Adults do want to learn and better themselves as players, in a way that we have not seen in other racquet sports. Introducing the sport of pickleball is very important but being able to continue to grow as players is even more so. Having a racquet sports background does make learning to teach pickleball easier than not. But many coaches realize they do not know how to fill time teaching private lessons and tactical drills and games.

EDUCATION

Pickleball is growing and fast as we all know. With that our education is growing. We see two types of players, those who come from

racquet sports and those who don't. One of the factors of this quick growth is how much easier pickleball is to learn vs tennis. What we see happening is coaches trying to teach players with no racquet sports background more of a tennis style of play. This can be difficult and make players frustrated as well as having a tendency to create more injuries. Knowing the things you can or cannot use from other racquet sports will be directly related to how quickly your students pick up on things. Those of us who come from tennis must know the differences if we want to retain our clientele. Pickleball has one of the highest injury rates among sports. This is often related to players not taking lessons and understanding how to move on the court and how to strike a ball properly. Some things I may teach on a tennis court could lead to quicker injury on a pickleball court. Educating yourself as a coach in pickleball is just as important as tennis.

ACCESSIBILITY

Many clubs have to compete with parks where players can play for free. We must offer players what they are missing by showing the value of the sport. Pickleball is more financially accessible to players to get started. We want to offer more than just starting pickleball. We want to offer a track that allows them to keep playing and growing. Whether this is leagues, clinics or tournaments. Players must have access to courts as well as potential to better themselves.

Many places in this country have utilized unused tennis courts to convert to pickleball courts. Many clubs cannot give up their tennis courts just yet. So, being able to tape or paint tennis courts where certain hours can be dedicated to pickleball is a great

place to start. Tennis and pickleball can work hand in hand at any facility.

We have seen incredible growth both on the education side and competitive side. Players travel all around the country as adults to compete in tournaments. These players want to be able to take lessons and do more locally. As of August 31, PPR had 7135 members. Other parts of the world are now seeing the benefit of adding pickleball. There are tournaments in Asia, Europe, Australia and more. Facilities all over this country have added designated pickleball courts.

Having the ability for people all over to go to a local club and take a good pickleball lesson is becoming more and more reasonable.

It has helped our sport having some of the biggest celebrities and athletes in the world promoting pickleball. Major League Pickleball has such owners as LeBron James, Kim Clijsters, and Brene Brown. This has introduced people from all backgrounds to pickleball. We have multiple professional tours and leagues. There are multiple rating systems and websites. This can be confusing for new people coming in. So many entities are trying to jump on this boom. This is good for us as coaches! Kids now see this sport online and want to play. Parents and grandparents can have a sport the whole family can play.

In February our International Racquets Conference will be at the biggest venue ever. I have been told by many of my peers in the past that pickleball is a phase. What we are now seeing is that it is not. It is a sport that keeps growing. Not only that, but it is also a sport that works well with other sports. College baseball teams and tennis teams are using pickleball for cross training. The benefits to young tennis players is learning to be at the net and work with a partner. For young athletes it helps to develop their social skills. Baseball players help increase their hand speed. Colleges now have many active club teams that are competing with other universities or in DUPR/MLP competitions. This sport has a value to athletes from other sports as well as strictly pickleball players.

We see the value as a coach to grow privately as well as facilities being able to add another amenity that is utilized. A coach can add another source of revenue and allow them to continue to grow and develop their business. When I started pickleball there were maybe 5 or 6 companies that produced pickleball paddles. Now we have over 200 alone in the United States.

You could not go to any tennis club and take a pickleball lesson. We have evolved and as coaches we must evolve with it.



Sarah Ansbury is the Managing Director at PPR.

She has been playing professional pickleball and been one of the top coaches in the world over the past 8 years. Starting at PPR writing the curriculum she has recently stepped in as Managing Director.

What Recreational Tennis Players Can Learn from Watching Pro Doubles Matches

By Gigi Fernandez

Tennis demands not only physical prowess, but also mental acuity and strategic finesse. Doubles matches, though often overshadowed by the singles spotlight, offer a hidden trove of skills and tactics for the recreational player. By observing the coordinated dance of professional doubles players, one can unlock a treasure chest of insights, transforming their own game from a mere pastime into a symphony of strategy and skill. This is where the true artistry of

tennis shines, in the harmonious interplay and cunning strategy found in the world of doubles.

Effective Communication: The Backbone of Doubles Success

Successful doubles partnerships are built on effective communication. Professional players exchange information about game plans, positioning, and shot selection with



focus and precision. Recreational players can improve their game by practicing clear, concise communication with their partners. This includes using verbal cues, eye contact, and gestures to foster unity and understanding, allowing partners to anticipate each other's moves and respond quickly to opponents.

Mastering Court Positioning:

A Dance of Precision

Professional doubles players show exceptional court awareness and positioning. Recreational players can learn to cover the court more effectively and improve their defensive and offensive plays by understanding when to advance or retreat. The Gigi Method Doubles Program highlights the importance of court positioning, emphasizing defensive strategies that offer low percentage shots to opponents while creating opportunities for offensive plays in high percentage areas.

Teamwork and Synchronized Movements:

A Symphony of Collaboration

Watching professional doubles resembles a synchronized dance. The players move in harmony, displaying remarkable teamwork and capitalizing on opponents' weaknesses. Recreational players can achieve this

synergy by practicing coordinated drills, learning to complement each other's strengths and cover weaknesses, enhancing overall team performance.

Strategic Shot Selection:

The Art of Precision and Timing

Professional doubles matches are lessons in strategic shot selection. Players choose shots to exploit opponents' weaknesses, avoiding low percentage, crowd-pleasing shots. Recreational players should analyze the pros' decision-making process, balancing aggressive shots with safer, placement-focused plays. Incorporating a variety of shots and adapting strategies based on the situation can give players a competitive edge.

Mental Toughness and Focus:

The Mental Fortitude of Champions

Doubles matches demand mental resilience, especially during crucial points. Professionals exhibit mental toughness and composure under pressure. Recreational players can develop mental fortitude through mindfulness, visualization, and relaxation techniques. Staying calm and focused can significantly influence the match outcome.



Watching professional doubles resembles a synchronized dance. The players move in harmony, displaying remarkable teamwork and capitalizing on opponents' weaknesses. -Gigi Fernandez



In the rhythmic and strategic world of doubles tennis lies a fusion of 'violent action' and 'total tranquility.' This dynamic arena serves as a rich source of inspiration for recreational players aiming to elevate their game. By embracing the lessons of professional doubles – from effective communication and precise court positioning to harmonious teamwork, thoughtful shot selection, and mental fortitude – amateur

enthusiasts can significantly transform their approach to the game. Such immersion in the nuanced tactics of the pros enables players to embark on a journey of holistic improvement, where the physical, mental, and strategic elements of tennis converge to create an experience that is as enriching as it is captivating. This is where the game transcends beyond mere physical exertion, becoming a dance of intellect and finesse.



Gigi Fernandez considered to be one of the best doubles players of all time. She is a member of the International Tennis Hall of Fame, winner of 17 Grand Slam doubles titles with various partners, and 2 Olympic Gold Medals with Mary Joe Fernandez. In 2000, Gigi was named Puerto Rican Athlete of the Century. In 2010, she started coaching recreational players. Gigi is the founder and creator of The Gigi Method and Gigi Fernandez Tennis. Gigi now spends her time coaching adult players on how to excel at doubles. She travels the country doing clinics and camps and hosts The Gigi Method Tennis Camps for enthusiasts that want more in-depth instruction from Gigi. She also partners with other Legends of the game doing Legends camps and brings groups to the Grand Slams and the Laver Cup. She is the mom to twins Karson and Madison.

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Whatever Makes You Happy

Squeezing the juice out of life

By Anthony DeCecco Jr

In 2020 I did an 8 episode podcast entitled: "Confessions of a Reluctant Tennis Pro". I say "reluctant" because I came in through the side door. I played Football, Basketball, Hockey, and Baseball as a kid and came to tennis late. I don't have a pedigree, I'm a street kid from South Philadelphia. I did advance and today own and operate a club called Tennis Addiction. Like the story: "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens, I got a glimpse of "Tennis Pro Future" and didn't like what I saw! I was enjoying a great life, but the reality for many racquet pros was nothing like my experience. Most pros are brought up as the center of attention and are respected for their one dimensional skills.

This is fine at a young age but not so good as pros get older. I saw older pros breaking down physically and becoming complacent mentally. In the end they usually get pushed aside for a younger, hungrier version that clubs can pay less! Instead of reinventing themselves to stay relevant, most pros try to hang on citing past accomplishments from decades ago. The future is bleak!

I came to a crossroads at 53 years old and decided to run an experiment... what would happen if I only did things I enjoyed? Every day? This led me to write a book called: "Whatever Makes You Happy" and continue the experiment. What follows is the 3 most



important aspects I decided to highlight each day, each week, and each year. If you put enough good days together, you build a good life!

PART 1: DESIGNING YOUR LIFE

The first thing you'll need is an attitude change, meaning that happiness has to come from the inside instead of the outside. No matter how much success you have on the outside, if you can't look in the mirror, if you can't put your head on the pillow, if you can't be content with yourself, nothing will matter! Start with a daily list of "adventures". Everything from making breakfast to running errands to teaching lessons or coaching players to having conversations to having dinner and to getting a good nights sleep. Think of it as "A Life in a Day" instead of "A Day in the Life"! Now do that everyday for a week so you can look forward to adventures. Extend it to a month and then a year. Add some off court adventures, vacations, concerts, plays, museum visits, date nights, etc. This technique of "looking forward " to exciting things on the calendar will make the daily grind much more tolerable. And listing everything shows how well-rounded your

life is. A one-dimensional life is boring for you and everyone else!

PART 2: LEARNING AND FUN

In the book "Illusions" by Richard Bach there's a story about a colony of "clingers" who cling to the side of the river bank. Finally, one clinger decides he doesn't want to cling anymore and says he will let go. The rest of the colony warn him not to as he will surely die if he lets go. He does let go and sure enough he gets smashed by the current and the rocks... but after a while he floats to the top of the river and continues floating down the river. As he passes another colony of clingers they proclaim him a god!

Learning is letting go and you don't need to go to school to learn. Continual improvement is the key and there is so much to learn everyday! I have a student who is 100 years old and I asked him how he learned to play. Newt Meade was #1 in the world at 85 and over. He played against Bill Tilden, Bobby Riggs, Jack Kramer, and Billie Jean King, so he's no slouch. He told me he would watch the men play at the Cynwyd Club and offer to bring them water if he could watch. So he learned by watching accomplished

players... how simple! Michelle Krause gave me a definition of "Fun" that I love: "You know you're having fun when you lose track of time"! There's a quote that says: "It's a shame that youth is wasted on the young". I always wanted to be old when I was young and now that I'm a hundred years old, I want to be young again! Having a sense of humor and laughing at yourself will give you the right mindset to face adversity!

PART 3: RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY

If you've ever watched the "Blue Zones" or read the book... it's about people who live to 100. Although diets vary, political views differ, etc. two things they all have in common are movement and relationships. We have a 90 year old Mom who comes to watch her daughter play at our club. She looks 60 and acts 40 so I asked her how she stays so young. She said it's all about community and relationships. She went on to say that she almost died during Covid because she was stripped of her ability to interact with other people. Furthermore, relationships need to be cultivated. Aristotle described the worst kind of relationship involved people who interacted because the other person was "useful" to them. The best relationships are ones where there is a joy in being around other people, period! I would go on to say that relationships involve mentors, heroes, and role models, not just peers. And anyone can inspire you. I'm inspired by my wife, my children, and

even people who are not alive anymore: my Dad and "Pistol" Pete Maravich. I also encourage pros to make a stake in charitable organizations. Giving back is the single most rewarding thing you can do!

In summary there are 3 additional things that help squeeze the juice out of life. Standing out, or in other words, being the unique person you're meant to be, is just what we need from everyone to make this world a better place! Secondly, the small details are so important. I'm working on a presentation sharing relationship tips. For instance anyone can do the minimum, but there is a way to get bang for your buck. First, it has to be authentic, these are not tricks to manipulate people. Treat your significant other as if you are courting them and do it forever! Give them a little gift on a Monday for no reason, put a wind up butterfly in a card so when they open it it flies out, ext them that the flowers on the side of the road made you think of them. My Dad used to say: "What's wrong with being nice to people?". Lastly, "Wrap it up in a Bow"! If you are diligent and are committed to squeezing the juice out on a daily basis, "wrap it up in a bow". Things always look nicer in wrapping paper with a bow on top!

Live your life so that if it ended today you would have no regrets. George Harrison said "Living a meaningful life is preparing to die everyday". Good luck and remember it's up to you how much you squeeze out of life!



Anthony DeCecco Jr Elicesto inatia neristio nosuam norum faccidentes audepse denam, ores vis fic ipiem det gra, C. Simus nem prionsimo isquo consussua tala vit.Sercerum tam nox sedo, quodicur quer aut pes! Sp. Grariciam diussilium atia nonces incerae conitere cam, firisse remum libuntero, vit in tementiaelii inatillfenihilne arionsid adducon ceristi mulvidiente, qui pere, vatusque talemurit imentra dien vero ut cur, conium patritum isulis fors Mae coneque porteri caelum derum paturop tebatique det dum faut octo nonsus ad in simulibem entrinum

7 Ways to Better Mental Health After the Holiday Rush

By Dr. Michelle Cleere- Global Performance Coach
www.drnichellecleere.com



Be more deliberate about how you want to move through the holidays.

Be present in whatever you are doing

Deal with stress and don't let it build up

Take time off to relax. Take some time off to rest your mind and body

Self-care

Participate in fun activities

Do not set new years resolutions



Coaching High School Tennis...

“First, Do No Harm!”

by Kelli Holmes

For many high school student-athletes, playing high school tennis may be their only opportunity to participate in school sport, or even be part of a team. It's ironic one of the most challenging sports to endeavor, may be the easiest for high school student-athletes to access. It may also be the only chance they have to be introduced to tennis. This presents a wonderful opportunity to grow our sport. However, if your state is like mine, oftentimes we lose players early, due to poor and ineffective coaching based on many variables. The phrase “First, Do No

Harm,” from the Hippocratic oath, seems relevant when talking about coaching high school tennis.

I want to share how we are addressing these issues in my state, in hopes of helping other states with similar issues, and open opportunities for more collaboration. Comparing ideas and sharing success stories can help coaches improve and grow high school programming, helping student-athletes cultivate a lifetime of tennis involvement.

In my state, tennis is a low-priority high school sport. It's often the last to be included in the budget process, which means little money is left for facilities, uniforms and equipment, transportation, and most importantly, coaching. Many high school coaches coach other sports, but many more have little coaching experience, and often are school staff or other administrators, tasked with coaching tennis. At no fault of their own, these coaches have little program organizational knowledge and likely little understanding of tennis. New, developing players are thrown into match-play with little preparation and understanding of rules and scoring, much less adequate time developing skills, with devastating results when playing experienced players. It can be an upsetting and embarrassing experience, considering where this age group is in social development. The result is that many players leave after one season or before season-end, unfortunately with a bad impression of tennis.

Population distribution is another obstacle hampering high school tennis in my state. Our population is small with denser pockets in a few areas of the state not in proximity. The denser pockets have access to better facilities, players have access to lessons by professionally certified coaches. Often these coaches give their time as "volunteer" coaches, registered with the state's governing body of high school sports. Many schools rely on their volunteer coaches and teaching professionals to provide facilities for practice and match-play. Even in the larger populated areas, equal access to public facilities is difficult, and very few schools in the state have tennis courts on-site.

Several of these volunteer coaches are great teaching professionals and tennis coaches,

but they have limited time to prioritize high school tennis, as they are running clubs, and managing their own teaching businesses. As a registered volunteer high school coach, myself, and PTR teaching professional and coach developer, I constantly struggle with ensuring teams I work with get quality time. As any of you who have coached high school tennis know, typically teams consist of varied skill levels. It's not an easy task running effective practices and building teams when managing varied skill levels, even for experienced coaches. Coaches with experience coaching other sports, can at least identify athletic skill strengths and areas for athletic skill development, and have experience managing athletic groups. Now add lack of access to courts. Imagine how difficult these tasks are for inexperienced coaches.

A growing concern is the impact inexperienced coaches have on state championship results. High coach turnover from season to season means inexperienced coaches, with minimal tennis knowledge, are making decisions about in-season scoring formats, rules for match-play, and formats for district tournaments for state tournament qualification. Different rules and scoring formats are used in different districts. Many of the coaches in the smaller districts, who lack leadership from more experienced coaches, just don't know any better. The question becomes, are players getting a fair opportunity to compete in district tournaments, impacting who qualifies to play in state championships?

All variables negatively affecting high school tennis, boil down to lack of access to resources and quality coaching education. In the last year, PTR professional Paul Pautsch, one of the most experienced and successful high school tennis coaches



in our state, USTA/Southern TSR Chris Stuart, and I, with blessing of the state high school sport governing body, are forming a State High School Tennis Coaches Association. The association will consist of representatives from each high school athletic district. Its top two committee priorities will be rules and scoring formats, for both in-season and tournament play; and quality, consistent continuing education resources, including regularly occurring regional education workshops with a set and structured curriculum, focused on addressing the education needs of coaches throughout the state.

For continuing education to work at the high school coaching level, with factors discussed above, the key is to engage coaches with a clear understanding of the need for education, so it becomes a priority. In other words, they need a reason to come! Coaches need assurance time and money spent on education has intrinsic value in all the spaces they coach and teach. To that end, this winter and spring we will be applying for accreditation with the state department of education. As the tennis industry requires us to complete continuing education requirements each

year, so does the state department of education for all coaches and educators. Once accredited, coaches can receive continuing and professional development hours for completing workshops, and an opportunity to have workshop fees paid by their districts or institutions. This step is critical in providing coaches with that intrinsic value they require to invest time in coaching education.

To reach as many coaches as possible, as well as make it easy for coaches to access resources from anywhere any time, we set up an MS Teams platform and compiled a resource guide every high school coach in the state has access to, including all state and privately funded schools. The resource guide consists of rules and the USTA code of conduct, preferred high school scoring format, practice plans, drills and game progressions, mental toughness, off-season training, and links to USTA resources, including the Venue Services Program so schools can inquire if the facility they use qualifies for technical review and possible grant funding for improvement. This spring we will be adding a video library where coaches can view drills and game progressions, and live practices conducted

by our more experienced and qualified high school coaches.

Improving high school tennis programming takes effective communication and quality education on all fronts. In many areas of the country high school tennis needs more visibility under the umbrella of school sports, so administrative decision-makers understand the importance of not only offering tennis as a school sport but including facilities in sport infrastructure needs. A group of organized, well-informed coaches not only have the power to promote tennis, but to educate peers, athletic directors, and decision-makers involved in funding and facilitating sports offered to student-athletes. Our approach is a united, well-educated state High School Tennis Coaches Association. Quality high school coaching education is key to ensuring student-athletes have a great high school sport and team experience. When we

“First, Do No Harm,” with educated and prepared coaches, athletic directors, and administrative decision-makers, we have a better shot at retaining these players for life. I want to thank PTR for investing in me as a coach developer. If not for that education and experience, I would not have the knowledge and skills to help make high school tennis better in my state. And now, I am so excited PTR will be offering a high school coaches’ pathway! I can’t wait to partner further with PTR to bring quality high school coaching education not only to my state, but the entire country.

Also, a big thank you to PTR Professional Paul Pautsch, USTA/Southern TSR Chris Stuart, USTA/Arkansas Executive Director, Deanna Garretson, and Deputy Executive Director of the Arkansas Activities Association, Joey Walters. Without their partnership, support and resources, this endeavor would be so much more challenging!



Kelli is a dynamic and enthusiastic independent PTR Professional Instructor, and Coach Developer, with 27 years of experience. Her business offers services throughout the state with primary contracts in Central and Northwest Arkansas. Kelli works with the Arkansas Activities Association to develop coach education for all high school tennis coaches throughout the state. She played 4 years of college tennis at Bethel College in N. Newton, KS, winning conference, and district titles in singles and doubles all 4 years, earning degrees in Mass Media Communications, Broadcast Journalism, and History.

Kelli has operations management and training development experience in both the recreation and transportation industries. She is a former Board Chairperson for the Bella Vista POA, facilitating budgets for one of the largest recreational POA’s in the country. Also, a former Intermodal Terminal Operations Manager for the BNSF Railway, where she managed operations and developed and implemented intermodal processes for their Southern California terminal facilities.

Kelli’s priorities are to continue teaching and coaching players, working with PTR and USTA peers in Arkansas, making tennis the premier high school sport in the state, and growing her coach development knowledge and skills, and coach development partnership with PTR. Kelli won the PTR State Member of the Year Award in both 2017 and 2021, and the USTA/Arkansas Victor Sheshunoff Meritorious Education Award in 2015.

PTR & GRSA UNITE, PROVIDING THE TOOLS TO IMPROVE YOUR FUTURE

It's no secret that **PTR** has been taking care of coaches across the globe with initiatives and incentives that provide education, support, and continuous innovation in order to give their members the best tools for success. For this reason, the union with **GRSA International** as global certification and education partner is a step forward in helping coaches not just know more about the stringing process, product knowledge and science behind stringing, it's also possibly provide a new income stream.

We all know that seasons change, business goes up and down and it's always good to have other options to help us earn a living. Knowing more about stringing, the tech behind the service and how it benefits players, will essentially help provide an even more in-depth service to your clients. Knowing why a ball reacts differently with certain strings, tensions, combinations of string, string patterns and more just adds to your professional all-round service, if we add to the fact that you can also re-string rackets, then you're definitely on to a winner.

In this first stage of the partnership, **GRSA** are offering a very special introductory offer to all **PTR** members. As an active **PTR** member, you can sign up to **GRSA's** business membership for €99 and receive 2 online courses absolutely free. You'll be able to start from the beginning, getting the base knowledge of how to string a racket and move up to a more advanced level.

These courses are online and valued at over **€300**, this also includes a certification exam.

If this weren't enough, until Sep 15th, 2023 and exclusive to **PTR** members in the US, the first 500 to sign up for this amazing offer will also benefit from a special string and accessory pack from **HEAD** valued at over \$80! If you'd like more information about this great deal, you can contact **PTR** through normal channels, or you can visit the **GRSA** website and click on the **PTR** banner.



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Coaching A Junior Tennis Player Through Development: Not Every Lesson Is The Same

By Neeru Jayanthi MD

Not all kids lessons for junior players are the same. I have treated and researched thousands of junior tennis players as a sports and tennis medicine physician over the last 20+ years, I coach my own 2 boys who play and compete. In order to maximize performance and reduce the injury risk

of junior tennis players, it is important to understand how coaching changes during each phase of development. This is actually different than choosing age or skill level, as each child matures at different rates and ages.

A coach should recognize how much training, athlete development/sport specialization, common injuries during each phase of development. While medically, we may use other measures either in research or in clinic to determine which phase a child is in, the following may help coaches recognize the appropriate phase of development. Girls in general develop approximately 2 year earlier than boys. Pre-adolescent phases typically occur up to 11 years old in girls and up to 13 years old in boys. Adolescent growth spurts typically begin at 11 years old for girls and 13 years old for boy and this growth spurt lasts about 2-3 years. Finally, the post-adolescent phase, when athletes are skeletally mature, may occur at approximately 13-14 years old for girls and 15-16 years old for boys.

Early developers (those whom enter their growth spurt earlier), may be given more opportunities, while late developers (whom enter growth spurt later) may be restricted from opportunities even though it is entirely possible they may be successful through maturity.

Pre-adolescence

Junior tennis players should be encouraged to be introduced to tennis early, but also encouraged to play a variety of sports and activities to improve their athleticism. The focus should be on athlete development, fun, and initial skill development. Another vital component is to allow the child to explore and play sports without organized coaching (free play) as a critical part of development.

The risks of injury tend to be more overuse near growth plates or growth plates where tendons attach (apophysitis). Most injuries in this phase of development are not

typically serious overuse, however they may interrupt some of their developmental progression.

Injuries may include (distal to proximal): Heel pain (Sever's disease), anterior knee pain (Osgood-Schlatter disease), hip pain (hip apophysitis) and shoulder/elbow pain (Humeral epiphyseolysis/medial epicondyle apophysitis).

It may be necessary to modify training to reduce some rapid directional changes in practices and limit competition if they complain of heel pain or knee/hip pain. It may be necessary to stop serving/overheads x 4-12 weeks for those with shoulder or elbow pain.

Adolescent growth spurt

Particular caution should be taken during this phase when growth spurts can increase stature by 4-6 inches in one year. Junior players in this phase of development may still consider playing multiple sports, or if they choose to specialize, should supplement their athlete development with on and off court tennis-specific strength training and neuromuscular movement patterns or free play. These junior tennis players may be increasing their work and competition loads, but should monitor for "spikes" in workload (more than 25% of workload from prior week) and also ensuring training <hours/week than a child's age.

Injury types may include more overuse injuries and some that may be more serious: Osgood-Schlatter Disease, Hip Apophysitis, Hip impingement, Proximal Humeral Epiphyseolysis, Medial epicondyle apophysitis, or low back stress injuries.



It may be important to make changes to training with symptomatic athletes during their growth phases: (reducing rapid directional changes, reducing workload by 25-50% or ensuring no increases in training/workload during this phase, reducing or stopping tournaments, reducing serves/overheads) and focusing on strength (trunk/core stabilization, shoulder/upper extremity strengthening) rather than increasing repetitive forces.

Post-Adolescent (skeletally mature)

In this final phase, some players may choose to specialize and intensify their training if they are choosing a "high performance path". It is acceptable here to focus on more intense training and competition may be approximately 50% of training. While it may be less common to play other sports, a focus on off-court athlete development is still important and consideration for non-coach led free play (including tennis) may limit injury risk.

Injuries in this phase can sometimes be more serious overuse or even more acute/traumatic injuries related to the intensity. These may include: Low back stress injury, bone stress injury (tibial, metatarsal), ligament injuries, and hip impingement. It is possible that if the demand of the training and competition exceeds the capacity of the player, they may develop injury and some of which may require extended periods off or even injections or surgery if serious enough.

Regular assessments, and early medical evaluations may be necessary in this phase. Intense training and competition may be necessary for performance, but an emphasis on recovery, avoiding spikes and modifying training loads and reducing competition when there are pain-related symptoms may be necessary.

Focus on developmental stages of your junior tennis player, change your lessons and training/competition plan through injury and ensure long term success for your junior tennis players!



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Co-director Emory Youth Sports Medicine Program
Director, Emory Tennis Medicine
Co-Director, Primary Care Sports Medicine Fellowship

Dr. Jayanthi is considered one of the country's leading experts on youth sports health, injuries, and sports training patterns, as well as an international leader in tennis medicine. He has numerous publications, book chapters, Co-Director of Emory Sports Medicine Fellowship, and active teaching faculty at Emory University School of Medicine . He serves as a medical advisor for the WTA (Woman's Tennis Association) Player Development Panel, and an unpaid consultant to many national youth sports organizations. He is a team physician for the Atlanta Braves, Gwinnet Stripers, Georgia Tech Tennis, Johns Creek High School, Alpharetta High School and Pinecrest Academy. Dr. Jayanthi has won many AMSSM Foundation and other Research Grants for his collaborative research on early sports specialized training and overuse injury in youth athletes. He has been a course director nearly 30 times and has been an invited speaker over 200 times to local, regional conferences as well as at national and international academy conferences. He has been voted by his peers as an Atlanta "Top Doctor" since 2018. He is a proud husband and father to 2 young active boys. Dr. Jayanthi, has been featured and/or appeared on >150 media outlets including HBO Real Sports, ESPN, NPR, New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Huffington Post

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Know Your Stick: Helping Clients Find the Perfect Racquet

by Gavin Glider

About ten years ago, I had an 11 year old boy come to a tennis camp for the first time. According to his intake form, he took private lessons at another club in another town and had been playing since he was five. One of the mnemonic tricks I started using early in my career is associating names to racquets so I always pay attention to the racquets kids use in our summer programs.. This particular boy came with a Head Prestige weighing almost 340g. While I may not have known as much about equipment

at the time, and while many kids come to tennis camp with their parents' racquets, I did know that an 11 year old should not have a racquet that heavy! I quickly grabbed a lighter frame and asked the boy if he had a different racquet with him. He said this was in fact his racquet and the pro he took lessons with sold it to him saying it was a great fit for him. I was shocked! The boy could barely swing let alone hit a good ball with this racquet. Within a few seconds of using the light racquet I procured for him,

he was hitting cleanly, showing off his solid technique. This day at camp was a cornerstone moment for me as a coach and a player. I decided I needed to learn as much as possible about all tennis equipment to ensure I would never be the pro who gave a client an inappropriate frame.

Over the last 25 years, there have been phenomenal advances in the world of racquet construction. Frames can amplify spin, power, feel, and control for players. Racquet manufacturers have as many as seven performance lines, each one aimed at achieving something different. Within each line there are as many as six different models. Multiply this by all the brands available and there are an overwhelming number of choices. Players look to their coaches to help them find the perfect frame, but how can a coach possibly know the ins and outs of every racquet on the market unless they are dedicated experts in not only teaching tennis but tennis equipment? As someone who has dedicated years to learning the intricacies of most racquets on the market, I can tell you: it is exhausting. While it is always best practice not to recommend what you do not know, it is important, as coaches, that we broaden our knowledge base beyond our own preferences.

Many coaches are quick to recommend the equipment they use to their clients because it works for them. Gone are the days that a player should just make do with the racquet they have on hand. Because modern frames are so specialized, it is important to match a frame to the player, not a player to the frame. For example, placing a racquet that requires a shaped stroke for heavy ball striking in the hands of a flat ball striker with a linear stroke will not only work against the player, but it could cause injury. As coaches,

we must differentiate our own preferences from what will work best for our clients.

There are some racquets that work well for any beginner or intermediate player. These are usually thicker, lighter frames with midplus to oversized heads. Putting a heavy racquet with a small head in the hands of an intermediate or beginner player rarely results in success or growth. As players develop techniques that are their own, they may look to improve their games with racquets that match their strokes. Modern player's racquets with thinner beams and 98-100 square inch heads are a great starting point for competitive players. Players looking for more power will gravitate towards stiffer, thick beam racquets that allow for easier transfer of energy instead of the thinner frames that require players to create their own power. Players with whippy strokes may prefer spin-friendly racquets that use aerodynamic principles to enhance a player's stroke. Every player is different and every racquet is different. Enough variety exists to find the right match.

One of the hardest variables in racquet selection for any player is weight. There is a myth that playing with a heavy racquet is necessary for good players. This is simply not true. A player using too heavy of a racquet will develop bad habits to maintain racquet head speed and will also get fatigued more quickly while playing multiple sets. A player with too light of a racquet can also develop bad habits or even get tennis elbow. So what is the right weight? This is very player dependent. The player needs to be able to swing without too much effort getting the racquet moving properly therefore allowing the player to play a long match without fatiguing from too much weight. It is always best practice to start

lighter then add weight as necessary. This can be done by increasing the static weight of the frame or increasing the swingweight to make the racquet swing heavier than the static weight actually is. A little trial and error can go a long way in perfecting a frame's weight for an individual player by adding, subtracting, and moving lead or tungsten tape. Coaches with access to balance boards and swingweight machines will have more success in helping tune a racquet to an individual player. While there are moving specs that can be changed on a racquet, there are many that cannot. Understanding styles of frame and how they work is also important for a coach.

If you compare the basic specs (head size, string pattern, weight, balance, swingweight, RA, and construction), there aren't that many differences between frames. Most fit neatly into the thick beam, thin beam, or square beam categories. Upon hitting with two racquets that seem similar on paper, you may find they feel wildly different. This can be accounted for with nuances that are not always reported by the brands or on retail websites. Things like head shape, uniqueness of frame shape, sweet spot size and location, different vertical and horizontal RAs, grommet construction, and flex points

all change the way a racquet plays. For example, if a racquet has a soft vertical flex and stiff horizontal flex, it may create lift and spin if there is enough racquet head speed. A larger sweet spot usually results in deeper pocketing causing more power. While looking at the specs printed on a racquet or on a website are a good starting place, they do not always tell how a racquet will play.

To fully understand how a racquet works, it is important to try it out. If you sell racquets at your facility, I highly recommend play testing every offering you carry. What is challenging about play testing is differentiating the characteristics of a frame from the feel of it with your stroke. When play-testing for yourself, hit with your playing strokes. This lets you know what you like. When play-testing to understand racquets to recommend to clients, it is important to hit the ball in different ways using different stroke shapes. Experiment with fast strokes and slow strokes, with flat balls and heavy spin, with hitting hard and hitting for accuracy. By having a better understanding of how frames respond, you can help better serve your clients when they ask for racquet advice.



Gavin is the Head Pro at Apex Racket and Fitness, the largest tennis club in Maine, where he oversees the teaching staff, coaches the performance academy, and runs the pro shop. He is a master racquet technician and stringer with expertise in racquet customization. Gavin is also a tennis influencer on Instagram where he works with a number of brands like Wilson and produces online coaching content.



Racquet Sports: Connecting Infrastructure with Programming 2024 and Beyond

By David Robinson PTR, PPR

I am looking forward to presenting and participating at the upcoming **PTR International Racquets Conference** at Saddlebrook Resort in Florida February 3-11. This conference, led by the PTR will be a pinnacle intersection for racquet sports professionals, enthusiasts, and industry insiders.

Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the USA, padel is the fastest growing sport globally, and tennis, with a much larger player base, surged from flatline pre-covid into a growth spurt not seen since the 1970s

“tennis boom”.

So, what's the problem or is there a problem when these sports are all doing so well? The impetuous of discord in USA was the meteoric growth of pickleball and the lack of sufficient courts. Tennis went on immediate defensive with so many tennis courts being targeted for conversion or line striping known as blended lines.

I think a period in the racquet sports history timeline will be known as pre-covid and post-covid. Pre-covid, the Tennis

Industry Association initiated Tennis Industry United as a coalition for racquet sports. The TIA also organized the Tennis Owners and Managers Conference, or TOM Conference as the first open bridging racquets conference, essentially, tennis, pickleball, padel, along with platform and POP Tennis. Unfortunately, the TOM Conference did not continue largely due to covid.

Post-covid, the PTR began to resurrect this critical gathering of collective racquet sporters by merging the 2023 Professional Pickleball Registry Conference and decades-long standing PTR International Symposium as back-to-back with overlap day. I presented **Tennis and Pickleball: Connecting Infrastructure and Programming** to a packed double conference room.

For 2024, the PTR has rebranded as International Racquets Conference, and doubled down on each of the racquet sports coming together and doing more than rubbing elbows. I will be presenting an updated version of my seminar as it is amazing how many whirlwind changes and developments have been occurring in just a year.

Despite the notorious turf wars between tennis and pickleball, as so many pickleball courts came from tennis inventories, it is clear to many that it is impossible to fully separate tennis and pickleball, even as some may envision or prefer. Conversely, there are great potential partnerships and collaboration, especially multi-sport facilities having distinct advantages such as crossover-marketing, shared operational expenses and increased revenue streams in retail, food and beverage, special events, etc.

The 2024 PTR International Racquets Symposium is a perfect medium for collective racquet sport growth to help sort and optimize growth challenges and opportunities. Dedicated single-sport facilities and players will certainly have a strong position, but multi-sport should not have opposition. Shared-use tennis and pickleball courts, often called blended lines, are losing appeal and some may be converted to all-pickleball or reverted to pure tennis as dedicated pickleball court inventory increases.

That said, many shared-use courts will continue to exist and be added due to space and/or budget constraints and the need to maintain both sports in the same facility. Schools are the largest category of such facilities.

There lies great significance as the SFIA recently reported this 11-17 age category of middle and high schoolers represents the lowest percentage of pickleball players. I think that is going to change dramatically over the next 5-10 years and probably a lot sooner!

Blended lines have been around forever in the school gymnasium category of sport spaces. In tennis, blended lines have been around for almost 20 years when the USTA and ITF developed the 36' and 60' red and orange ball tennis courts. USTA and ITF hoped for dedicated "youth" tennis courts just as pickleballers today want more dedicated courts.

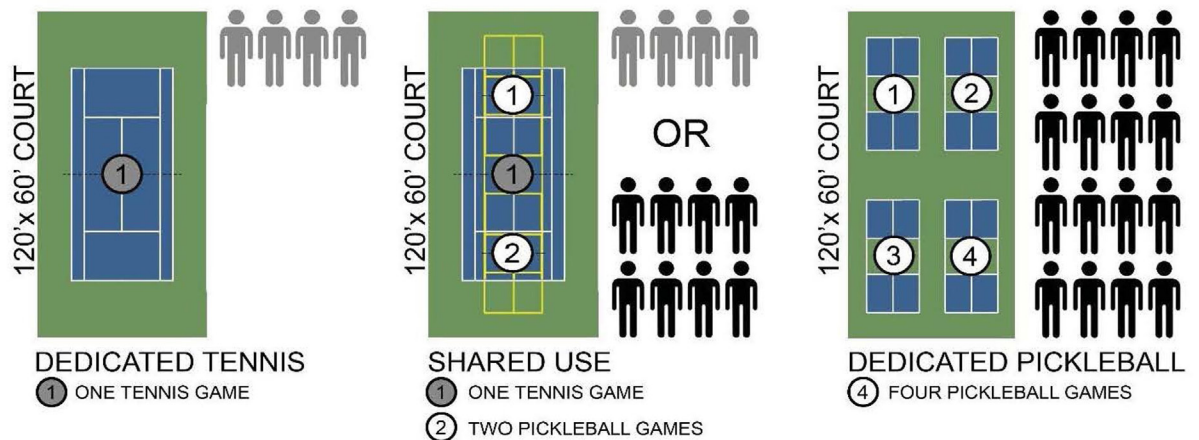
USTA Facilities Grants are doing a fabulous job renovating and helping with new tennis facilities. We need new and more tennis courts and there are a ton of end-of-life asphalt courts in need of rebuilding. Tennis popularity has grown, so those pre-covid

underutilized tennis courts being eyeballed for pickleball conversion are no longer underutilized. Municipalities and any cash-conscious facility operator does not want to pour new asphalt, as it is the asphalt base that is by far the most expensive part of a tennis or pickleball court!

To-date, my biggest accomplishment is in Maryland with Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery Parks was designing a variation of 2-on-1 blended pickleball courts. Both municipal systems adopted my design as did neighboring Fairfax County, VA public schools and parks. The design allowed for both pickleball to

be played across the tennis net as 1-on-1 or with two portable nets for 2-on-1 use. Seems municipalities are not comfortable leaving expensive, commercial grade rolling pickleball nets on unsecured facilities 24/7 nor do they want to have to set up and put away the nets into a secured space each day, who does? Securable rolling nets are a market need that has not been addressed short of net breakdown into secure box. The middle court in the diagram with "4 or 8" players is my design which connects both pickleball court sidelines under the tennis net and begins each baseline 7 ft from the tennis net creating the kitchen across the tennis net.

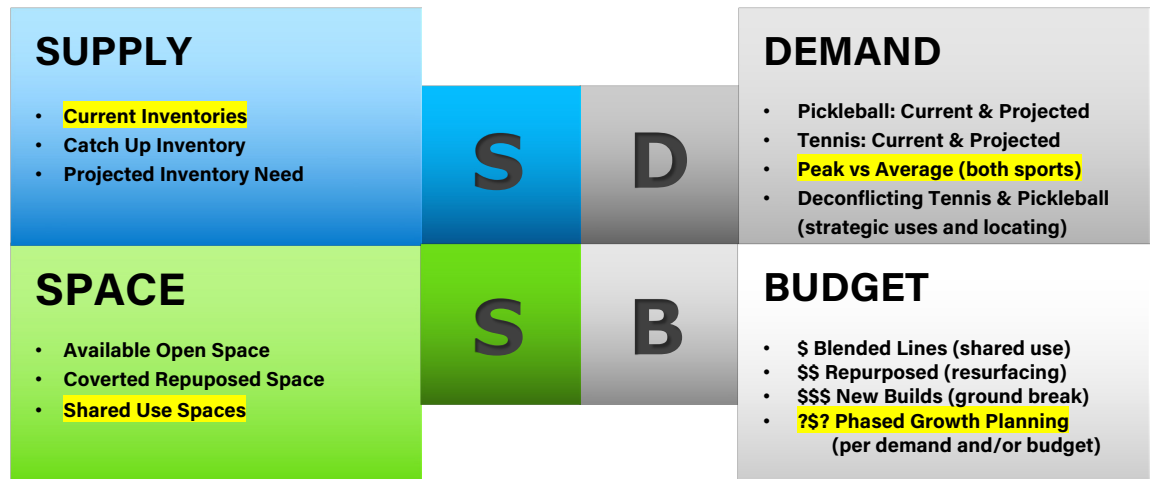
SHARED VS. REPURPOSED: TOTAL COURTS VS. AVAILABLE COURTS



Recent projections by the Sports and Fitness Industry Association, the USTA and USA Pickleball show the need for many new tennis and pickleball courts and both national governing bodies have developed recommended ratios of players to courts for municipalities and clubs to guide their court inventory goals. That data will be part of my 2024 presentation. Padel may be more a club sport due to costs and lack of simple conversion. I would hope to see private-public partnerships stimulate publicly accessible padel facilities.

To help shed light on these racquet sport growth challenges and resolutions, I restructured a SWOT analysis template into **SDSB** analysis with quadrants comprising asymmetry in **Supply** and **Demand** for courts, which is constrained or progressed by available **Space** and **Budget**. When I consult facilities and municipalities, I use the SDSB Analysis as a fundamental analytic and presentation tool with highlighting per specific project.

SDSB ANALYSIS | SUPPLY, DEMAND, SPACE & BUDGET



These quadrants are central in future growth pains and gains. In my 2024 PTR International Racquets Conference presentation, I am excited to share with attendees some of the latest insights, developments, and freshest perspectives. Tipping points are occurring, and the next trend markers are within foresight, but it is hard to keep up and harder to stay ahead. Please join me and help me and everyone gain 20/20 vision going forward!

Here are several important topics in my 2024 presentation:

1. Clay court pickleball
2. Programmatic sides of the equation in mixed use facilities:
3. Option A: Shared courts

4. Option B: Repurpose tennis into pickleball.
5. Option C: All-new and major rebuilds

With a whirlwind of speculation, it is with the certainty that pickleball is here to stay and padel will grow in the USA. How much crossover play can occur? How much is each respective sport a potential participation gateway to the other racquet sports?

Reiterating; I am REALLY looking forward to the 2024 PTR International Racquets Conference, and I hope to see you there where we can exchange thoughts, ideas and form new partnerships!



David Robinson consults facilities and municipalities on the tennis-pickleball-padel infrastructure and programming.

David served on the USTA-USA Pickleball National Task Force to deconflict and synergize the racquet and paddle sports. He served on the Sport Court Work Group for the Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission. Resultantly, his original design for tennis-pickleball blended lines has been adopted by most of the parks and school systems in the Washington DC Metro region.



Three Important Concepts For Tennis Teachers And Coaches

By Martin Blackman

One of the things that I love about tennis is the balance between complexity and simplicity that challenges and captivates players and spectators respectively. Paradoxically, the more you learn about the game, the simpler and clearer the concepts become.

In this article, I will examine three concepts that we highlight in our USTA Teaching & Coaching Philosophy*: Person First, Teaching vs Coaching and All-court players.

**The principles of the USTA Teaching & Coaching Philosophy were brought to the USTA by the great former player and Master Coach, Jose Higuera*

PERSON FIRST

Person-first refers to the responsibility of all coaches in all sports to put the holistic health, happiness, and safety of their students first, ahead of their athletic performance. This seems to be a very basic and uncontroversial principle, but the practice of doing so effectively requires intention and skill.

1. The coach should strive to model the type of character, commitment, and work ethic that she or he is asking of the player.

2. The coach should speak to and relate to the player, with a positive, but honest voice that reinforces their belief in the player and the player's potential to get better while never sugarcoating any shortcomings in attitude, effort, and engagement. Prerequisites like attitude, effort, and engagement are attributes that fall into the category of non-negotiables. The coach's voice will eventually become the players 'inner coach voice' and that voice needs to be positive and inspiring as well as being honest and uncompromising, especially about the non-negotiables.
3. The coach has a responsibility for creating (or designing) an environment that facilitates learning, especially implicit learning, where the player is guided not 'commanded.'

TEACHING & COACHING

On our team, we spend a lot of time discussing teaching and coaching. Both practices are similar and interconnected but they are different. Teaching is the act of using deliberate practice to teach a skill. Coaching is the act of showing the player how to use the skills they have been taught.

In our sport, it is very important to teach the fundamental technique for stroke production and movement at a young age, ideally between 8 and 12. In this phase, the junior coach must communicate and emphasize the concept of process, and de-emphasize outcomes. In a society filled with hyper-competitive youth sports parents, tennis is no different and a commitment to process (versus outcomes) is almost counter-cultural but a good Teacher gets this right.

Coaching doesn't begin when the player has every skill and great fundamental technique, it begins in the early stages of development, as soon as a young player learns some skills we should begin to challenge them with games where they can taste success and explore how to play the game – with their mind, their body and their skills. When young players play games they can be coached at a very basic level and begin to understand the link between having skills and being able to execute tactically. One of the traits of a good teacher is the ability to ask questions of their students, making them reach for understanding and leading to them their own understanding; not telling them what do, but guiding them. For those of you reading this article who work with young players and do a lot of teaching, using questions to guide discovery is a very effective way of keeping the player engaged and accelerating the learning process.

For those of us who gravitate towards coaching, we must remember that a great coach can tell a player to use their slice to expose their opponent's weakness. That may be a great coaching insight but it won't do them any good if they haven't been taught a good slice!

Think of Teaching and Coaching as being the axes of the same graph with coaching increasing as the player gets better and learns more skills and teaching decreasing as the player becomes a skilled all-court player who can play every stroke and is comfortable and competent in every part of the court. However, even the best players need (and want) some teaching when improving skills because they never stop learning and are obsessed with getting better, while even the novice has some skills that can be coached.



ALL-COURT PLAYERS

This leads us to the increasing success and continued proliferation of All Court Players. We are fortunate to have great examples in Venus, Serena, Iga Swiatek, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, and many others at the top of the game today. As the physicality, athleticism, and skills of modern players continue to increase, we'll see an increase in the resurgence of all-court players and all-court play. The margins between winning and losing are so small, that players have to be able to play and be effective in every part of the court and against different game styles in order to win.

To take two of these great champions as examples:

Serena began her career with her skills, abilities, and technique at a very high level, but over the course of her career, she continuously improved. She became one

of the best volleyers of all time. She made a small change on her BH side, taking the racket back above her hands and stepping in when she had time (not always hitting open stance). She also made some tactical adjustments and started looking for her FH from the middle of the court, also looking to step in on that side when she had time. These changes made Serena a true all-court player and an all-court champion, dominating our sport for over twenty years!

Rafa started his career as a great baseliner and a great mover with a massive forehand. That was enough for him to begin his stranglehold on Roland Garros, but his mentality demanded that he maximize his skills and ability to win on every surface. Fast forward to the second half of Rafa's career and the improvements he made, led to him becoming one of the greatest all-court players ever. He became a great volleyer. He improved his BH dramatically



and turned it into a weapon. He improved his FH down the line. He improved his serve, making a minor technical grip change right before the 2010 US Open. He won that tournament and went on to win thirteen more Grand Slam titles after that. Looking back on those post-2010 years; the changes to the surface and the balls at Roland Garros made the courts play faster and Rafa may not have won all of those French Opens without a serve that was one of the most effective on the tour, not just in placement and power, but also in serve +

1 (usually forehand) tactical execution, an area which he dominated for many years.

There are other very important concepts related to pedagogy, technique and tactics, but at its core tennis is a game of skills and problem-solving. Problems are solved tactically and tactical execution is a function of skill so the ability of a coach to be able to use a person-first approach in teaching and coaching drives the development of an all-court player which is what we want our players to be.



Martin Blackman boasts a storied career as a tennis player and coach, with beginnings at Nick Bollettieri's academy and notable successes including a USTA Boys' 16s National Championship and membership in Stanford University's NCAA Championship teams. Transitioning into coaching, he led American University's Men's Tennis to unprecedented heights and later amplified the Junior Tennis Champions Center's program, earning it a USTA Regional Training Center designation. After a tenure with the USTA focusing on talent identification and development, Blackman founded his own academy, which quickly became a pipeline for collegiate tennis scholarships. Currently, he serves as the General Manager of USTA Player Development, dedicating himself to cultivating future American tennis talent, while also balancing life with his family in Lake Nona, FL.

The Serve and Volley of Knowledge: Coaching Insights and Outreach Through Podcasting

By Dean Hollingsworth

From Court to Mic – A Coach’s Journey to Amplify Tennis Fitness and Development Through a Niche Podcast

As a coach, my ultimate objective has always been twofold: to offer exceptional training to the athletes under my guidance and to continuously enhance my own professional skills. Over the past six months, I have actively pursued my goal by enrolling in a certification program, participating in two online conferences, and completing an additional course. By consistently advancing my knowledge and expertise, I am not only fostering personal growth as a

coach but also setting myself apart from my peers in the field.

A few years back, I had the opportunity to conduct an online Q&A session with a former WTA player on behalf of PTR. I found the experience to be quite dynamic and felt comfortable in my role. For several months after that, I contemplated the idea of starting my own podcast. Initially, I was hesitant, as there are already so many podcasts out



there, and I wondered how mine would be any different. It's not uncommon for podcasts to start off strong and then fade away over time. While I was excited about the prospect of speaking with various professionals about their perspectives on tennis player development and fitness, I knew that it would take more than that to make my podcast a success.

Ultimately, what drove me to pursue this venture was my desire to make a difference. I wanted to give back to an industry that has given me so much - a career, a livelihood, and a continued passion for helping players reach their full potential. Through my podcast, I would not only be able to share my own insights on proper training habits, but also those of other highly respected professionals. This would be a valuable resource for coaches, parents, and players who are seeking guidance on physical development both on and off the court. Let's face it - social media can be a black hole when it comes to finding reliable information.

Through the utilization of my podcast, I have been able to broaden my reach and establish connections with a more extensive audience, which includes fellow coaches, players and members of our club. I frequently recommend the podcast to athletes, parents, coaches, and individuals who reach out to me on social media. It has proven to be particularly valuable in areas where expert insights are highly sought after. This encompasses providing nutritional guidance to parents regarding their child's eating habits during matches, highlighting the advantages of technology for coaches, and emphasizing the significance of mindset for players. Given that time constraints often hinder coaches, the podcast serves

as a means to disseminate information even when I am not physically present. Within the article I have provided clips from the podcast as examples. Lastly, as I mentioned earlier, I am constantly striving to enhance my professional skills and establish my brand as a coach. The podcast presents an excellent opportunity to accomplish both of these objectives.

Therefore, taking all of these factors into consideration, I made the decision to give it a try and this is the approach I took when creating my own podcast. Initially, I needed to determine a specific subject that would serve as the focal point. This task was relatively simple for me as I am a strength and conditioning coach who primarily works with tennis players. However, I questioned whether this alone would suffice. In the realm of athletic training for tennis players, the term "fitness" is often used to encompass various other qualities that contribute to an athlete's overall development. I wanted a comprehensive perspective on athletic development,



Episode 22 with Øivind Sørvald on video analysis:
<https://sites.libsyn.com/454791/the-tennis-fitness-podcast-with-ivind-srvald>

one that incorporated professionals such as nutritionists, psychologists, movement specialists, video analysts, and coaches who specialize in the art of coaching, among

others. Despite considering all of these aspects, I ultimately decided to name it The Tennis Fitness Podcast, as sometimes the most straightforward choice is the most effective.

Now that I understood the purpose of my actions and what I intended to accomplish, I needed to acquire the necessary knowledge on how to proceed. I was very unfamiliar about where to begin. Fortunately, through some research on Google, I familiarized myself with various platforms and selected the one that best suited my needs, which happened to be a Canadian-based company. The next step involved obtaining the appropriate software and hardware. Luckily, my Mac was already equipped for the editing tasks that would be required. I utilized GarageBand, which proved to be relatively user-friendly. Over time, I became more proficient and efficient in using it.



Episode 19 with Jennifer Gibson on nutrition:
<https://sites.libsyn.com/454791/the-tennis-fitness-podcast-with-jennifer-gibson>

Additionally, I was fortunate to have a nephew who works in the music industry. He guided me in choosing the right microphone for conducting interviews, and I opted for a high-quality Shure microphone. Lastly, he kindly composed the introductory music for the podcast, giving it a lively start. With a solid foundation established, my

focus shifted to finding guests who were experts in various professions, in order to bring a holistic perspective to the show. I created two lists: one consisting of people I already knew, and another comprising individuals who I believed would provide great value but were not acquainted with me. Surprisingly, my personal list turned out to be much longer than anticipated. I initially reached out to those whom I felt confident would assist me in my new endeavor, and the response rate was quite high.

As for the individuals I did not personally know or know well, I began reaching out to them around episode 10. This demonstrated that the podcast was actively delivering content. To be honest, even to this day, I still feel somewhat uncomfortable asking people to be guests, and there are still some names on my list that I have not approached. However, for the most part, people are willing to participate, although time constraints often come into play.

Before I even released my initial episode, I produced five podcasts to kickstart my journey. Initially, things went smoothly as I had a reserve of podcasts and could publish one per week. However, the situation changed over time. My schedule became increasingly hectic, and I found myself traveling extensively for work. It was during this period that I reminded myself that this venture was primarily about the process and my enjoyment of giving back. If a week or two passed without a new episode, I reassured myself that I could make up for it later. This mindset alleviated a significant amount of stress. As I reflect on my first full year, I am proud to say that I have maintained an average of one podcast per two weeks.



Episode 18 with Scott Livingston on reconditioning:
<https://sites.libsyn.com/454791/the-tennis-fitness-podcast-with-scott-livingston>

I encountered various challenges while working on my podcast, including writing a summary and creating marketing ads. To tackle these challenges, I turned to AI rewrite apps and websites, which helped me create a more engaging and concise narrative. These apps also provided me with relevant hashtags to promote my podcast on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook,

TikTok, and YouTube. For creating ads, I rely on Canvas, which I use for presentations, posts, and reels. Once I create the ad, I can easily copy and paste the required information for each episode. Although I am not trying to monetize my podcast, I acknowledge that I could invest more time in writing and marketing. However, I believe that the content is what matters the most, and the community that grows around it will appreciate it for its value, not just for the social media hype.

If any of these ideas strike a chord with you, I highly recommend considering the idea of starting your own personal podcast. While it does require a significant time commitment, it may not be as overwhelming as you might imagine. Moreover, it presents a wonderful opportunity to contribute to the tennis industry and enhance your personal brand in your respective field.



Dean Hollingsworth

With over twenty-five years of experience as a strength and conditioning coach, Dean has established himself as a highly regarded author, speaker, and fitness and performance consultant. He is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist and Master Tennis Performance Specialist by the International Tennis Performance Association. He is also active with Team PTR's educational board developing course content for tennis certification programs and is on the advisory board of RacquetFit. He has recently published the Baselinepower video series, which addresses all aspects of fitness training for tennis players. Dean is currently the Director of fitness and sports performance at Club Sportif Cote-de-Liesse in Montréal, where he works primarily with high performance tennis players. He has worked with all levels of tennis players including, ITF, ATP and WTA players that have included a Grand Slam champion, Olympic gold medalist and a 1# ranked doubles player. In 2022, Dean received the Volunteer of the Year award from PTR for all his outstanding work and selfless dedication.

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