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## Participation, Commitment, and Loyalty Towards Youth Tennis: Player and Parent Perceptions

Jill Fjelstul

*University of Central Florida, [jill.fjelstul@ucf.edu](mailto:jill.fjelstul@ucf.edu)*

Asli Tasci

*University of Central Florida*

Alan Fyall

*University of Central Florida*

Karl Davies

*United States Tennis Association*

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## Participation, Commitment, and Loyalty Towards Youth Tennis: Player and Parent Perceptions

### Cover Page Footnote

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## Participation, Commitment, and Loyalty Towards Youth Tennis

### INTRODUCTION

Youth participation in sport can be a tremendous contribution to physical, mental, and emotional health (DeBate, Pettee Gabriel, Zwald, Huberty, & Zhang, 2009; Fraser-Thomas, Cote, and Deakin, 2008; Gabriel and DeBate, 2011; Merkel, 2013). However, achievement of these benefits depend on a holistic sport experience in different stages with involvement of all influential stakeholders. There are numerous stakeholders directly or indirectly contributing to youth participation and longevity in sport, including parents, coaches, and sporting organizations. Likewise, there may also be actions by these stakeholders that adversely affect youth participation and their longevity in sport. Numerous authors have examined the influence parents may play in youth sport (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, and Deakin, 2008; Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes and Pennisi, 2006; Knight and Holt, 2014; Rottensteiner, Laakso, Pihlaja, and Konttinen, 2013). Parents are best positioned to introduce and initiate sport to their child/children at an early age. Studies have explored parents' influence and involvement as related to participation, enjoyment, and loyalty to sport. Similarly, the coach's impact in youth sport participation and commitment is also prevalent in the literature (Harwood and Knight, 2009; Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand and Briere, 2001; Rottensteiner, Laakso, Pihlaja, and Konttinen, 2013) as a coach's influence and involvement may compliment or possibly supersede the parent's role.

Sporting organizations at the local, national, and global levels have adopted and showcased youth programming they believe best suits their mission and goals in support of youth sport. For example, the American Development Model (ADM) was developed by the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) in an effort to help children maximize their potential, enjoyment, and longevity in sports (USOPC, 2022). One of the ways the ADM accomplishes this is through a comprehensive long-term athlete development plan (LTAD) that establishes training, competition, and recovery guidelines for youth athletes based on their biological stage of development to help prevent burnout, injuries, and dropout. Specific to tennis, the United States Tennis Association notes youth tennis programming for ages 6-18 (USTA, 2022a).

Sports, as noted previously, offer diverse benefits for youth in social, physical, psychological, and mental dimensions (DeBate, Pettee Gabriel, Zwald, Huberty, & Zhang, 2009; Fraser-Thomas, Cote, and Deakin, 2008; Gabriel and DeBate, 2011; Merkel, 2013). Youth sport focus is prevalent in the research yet tennis specific literature is scarce. The current study focused on tennis for measurement for several reasons. Tennis is a unique sport in many different aspects. First, tennis is historically stigmatized as a higher social class sport activity even though tennis players are much more diverse nowadays. Second, tennis is an individual sport that nurtures individual development; it does not require a team to play and enjoy the sport; it can be simply played against a wall and even a screen nowadays with the help of technology, as a casual sporting activity to elite levels and globally. Third, even though it is an individual sport, it can be expanded as a team sport, played with one additional person to deem it as a singles match and three additional players for doubles. Fourth, tennis can be modified with softer balls, smaller

racquets, and on smaller than regulation courts. Fifth, tennis can also be modified for those with disabilities, limitations, or in wheelchairs. Sixth, tennis is a lifelong sport that can be played at any age or skill level, by any gender, with family, friends, or formalized activity, and can be played both inside and outside. According to the Physical Activity Council participation report (USTA, 2022b), 22.6+ million people played tennis in 2021, an increase of 4.5% from 2020. And finally, there are numerous perceived and documented health benefits in playing tennis (Ohlsson-Walker, 2021; Schnohr et al., 2018). Thus, the current study examined player and parent perceptions of perceived benefits for participating in and commitment and loyalty towards tennis in relation to its perceived benefits. The findings of the current study contribute to the tennis industry by identifying the top benefits of tennis perceived by players and parents/guardians. Results offer opportunities for the tennis and sport promoting organizations to focus marketing efforts on the perceived benefits while also focusing on the not so popular benefits identified in the current study to increase participation in and loyalty towards the sport.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

### **Perceived Benefits of Sport Participation**

Sports are typically structured activities, offered in both individual and team formats, and involve differing skills and competencies (Duda and Ntoumanis, 2005). Sports offer a shared activity, engagement, and fun between participant, parent, and community members (Theokas, 2009). A successful sporting environment encourages a child's continual participation in sporting and physical activity, supports the child's psychological well-being, and creates youth-based opportunities to develop lifelong skills (Harwood, Knight, Thrower, and Berrow, 2019). Persistence, teamwork, leadership, and character development have also been well noted as life skills experienced through sport (Baron, 2007; Weiss, 2004).

Achievement of these benefits depend on successful management of sport progression. The Development Model of Sport Participation is a framework studying sport progression from sampling to specialization (Cote and Fraser-Thomas, 2007). Cote (1999) noted an emphasis in motor development and fun during the sampling years of ages 6-12. Intrinsic motivation and fun are often realized during ages 6-12 contributing to enjoyment and commitment (Baker, Cote, and Abernathy, 2003). Achievement of perceived benefits in different stages define commitment and loyalty to sport.

### **Sport Commitment and Loyalty**

Sport commitment and loyalty have been recognized in the literature since participation in sport is typically voluntary (Larson, 2000; Larson, Hansen, and Moneta, 2006). Sport commitment and loyalty have been defined as the ambition steadfastness to maintain participation in a defined program, specific sport, or sport activity (Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, and Keeler, 1993). Loyalty and commitment in sport, generally speaking, depend on the youth participating, to the parents of the youth participant, and to the organization offering youth sport. With such variation, findings and implications from previous research offer a deeper understanding into sustaining participation in youth sport.

Sport commitment and loyalty depend on stage in participation. For example, Baker, Cobley and Fraser-Thomas (2009) identified four parameters that delineate early specialization; early start age in sport; committed to only one sport at an early age; participates in high intensity training at a young age; and active in sport competition at an early age. Gould (2010) and Gould and Carson (2014) found parents tend to believe early specialization in sport increases college scholarship opportunities. Russell and Limle (2013), however, stated specialization in one sport before adolescence is discouraged according to the Academy of Pediatrics yet youth who chose to specialize typically did so prior to adolescence. Baker, Cote, and Abernathy (2003) found specialization focused training during similar ages resulted in minimal enjoyment and showcased sport related weaknesses by the participant. Strachan, Cote, and Deakin (2009) stated youths are at greater risk of physical, psychological, and development issues such as burnout, injuries, and social isolation. Butcher et al. (2002) claimed lack of joy and fun as the main reasons for leaving sport at an early age. Wall and Cote (2007) found sport environments with more focus driven practice in young children correlated to higher dropout rates in hockey. Gould and Carson (2014) labeled sport as too professionalized when substituting education and life skill development with year round training, early specialization, rankings, and winning. Zahariadis, Tsorbatzoudis, and Alexandris (2006) studied youth athletes of soccer, basketball, volleyball, handball, and water polo with regards to self-determination and sport commitment. Findings indicated that high self-determination supports their commitment to sport while low self-determination reduces their commitment.

Additional studies referencing commitment and loyalty in youth sport have identified outside activities, coaches, peer acceptance, and competitive tone and dialogue as important influences. Williams, Raedeke, Dlugonski, and DuBose (2022) found swimmers ages 13-18 who participated in other activities reported the lowest burnout. Similarly, Weiss and Weiss (2006) noted greater motivation, effort, and persistence when coupled with outside activities. Williams (2013) identified coaches who create environments promoting joy, value, and personal attention were more likely to observe commitment and loyalty to youth sport. Further, youth sport participants experiencing peer acceptance and friendships were more likely to continue in their respective sport, according to findings from Ullrich-French and Smith (2009) and more recently Wolman and Fraser-Thomas (2017). Wolman and Fraser-Thomas (2017) discovered teams noting competitive and winning value success over loyalty to their players.

### **Perceived Benefits of Tennis Participation**

Tennis offers diverse benefits as potential influences on commitment and loyalty. The United States Tennis Association (USTA, 2022b), the national governing body for the sport of tennis, lists tremendous insight on the health benefits of tennis, such as aerobic, anaerobic, and muscular fitness, agility, hand-eye coordination, and social skill development to name a few on their social media platforms. Tennis is noted as a low injury risk sport due to it being non-contact and with low impact. If injury does occur, it typically is due to overuse. Furthermore, Schnohr et al. (2018) studied leisure activities and life expectancies, finding tennis players on average lived almost 10 years longer than those classified as non-exercisers and those known to go to the gym on a regular basis. Tennis has also been researched as a tool for holistic child development. Ohlsson-Walker (2021) outlined how the environment of tennis shapes the DNA of a child from

the perspective of a behavioral geneticist. Findings included nurturing children with love and hope leads to life fulfillment on and off the court, educating children on how to examine challenges improves their ability to manage disappointment in later years, and learning is embedded in childhood and adolescence. Additionally, life experiences in general are remembered in the brain and in the body, thus, tennis offers potential benefits in building character on and off the court, and on health.

### **Tennis Commitment and Loyalty**

The literature on commitment and loyalty to tennis in relation to the perceived benefits of tennis are scarce, providing credence to the current study. Weiss, Kimmel, and Smith (2001) noted enjoyment had the most effect on tennis participation, motivation, and intentions to continue playing the sport. Weiss and Smith (2002) determined companionship, pleasant playing experience, and commonalities amongst players were aligned with enjoyment and commitment to tennis. Casper, Gray, and Stellino (2007) found personal investment, enjoyment, involvement opportunities, and social support were predictors of sport commitment for adult tennis players. Casper, Gray, and Stellino (2007) also noted younger players reported lower commitment than older players but stated that younger players do not have longevity in the sport, thus forecasting future commitment levels could be challenging.

In 2002, the Tennis Industry Association depicted a decline in recreational tennis participation from 1999-2004 and a more significant decline in tennis participation from those classified as frequent players, playing 21+ times per year (Casper and Andrew, 2008). In 2004, the Tennis Industry Association concluded the declining participation rates were directly related to increased opportunities from other activities (Casper and Andrew, 2008). The current study aims to fill the void in the tennis literature by identifying the perceived benefits of tennis and their influences on youth's commitment to and loyalty to tennis.

### **Parental Involvement**

Involvement by parents in youth sport is also influential on youth commitment and loyalty to sport. Fraser-Thomas, Cote, and Deakin (2008) found high levels of support, inspiration, involvement, and gratification from the parents are related to a youth's satisfaction, internal drive, and desire to welcome challenges. Parent support, encouragement, involvement, and satisfaction have been associated with more enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, and preference for challenge. However, when parents exhibit behaviors detrimental to their children's attitudes toward a sport, they end up being a catalyst for attrition. Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes and Pennisi (2006) found 36% of parents imposed negative influences on their children's development. Some of the most noted reasons were an over-emphasis on winning, harsh criticism and improbable expectations. Rottensteiner, Laakso, Pihlaja, and Konttinen (2013) found similar results, namely the negative effect of parental over- involvement and low amounts of physical and/or social support. Parental involvement can also be influenced by their perception of the sport and its benefits. For this reason, the current study measures and compares the perceived benefits of tennis in order to identify potential mismatch in perception and to reflect on how it may

negatively influence player commitment and loyalty to tennis besides players' own perceived benefits of tennis and how they influence their commitment to and loyalty towards tennis.

## **METHODS**

Cross-sectional survey design was used for the purposes of this study. Tennis players and their parents/guardians across the USA were targeted to assess their perceptions of the benefits of tennis and how these benefits contribute to commitment and loyalty for players. A short and concise survey was designed based on the literature on perceived benefits of sports. In developing the benefit scale, the relevant literature and other sources such as the USTA materials were used to identify the typical sport benefits and tennis-specific benefits. In developing and purifying the scale items, the USTA authorities were consulted and used as experts to finalize the scale.

The final scale included 18-items (1= Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree) reflecting diverse social, psychological, physical, and mental benefits of tennis as a sport. The survey question asked respondents to rate their agreement level on these benefits to encourage participation in tennis. Also, a 1-item and 10-point (0=Extremely uncommitted, 10=Extremely committed) holistic measure of commitment to tennis and another 1-item and 10-point (0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely) holistic measure of loyalty to tennis were also designed. Finally, sociodemographic questions including age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, highest level of education, state of residence, annual household income, the number of children in the household, involvement in tennis, the length of involvement in tennis, and others in the social circle involved in tennis were also asked to describe the nature of the sample acquired.

The survey was designed on Qualtrics and e-mails were sent to invite both tennis players and their parents/ guardians to participate in the study. The USTA sent both the initial invitation and reminders to all participants in the study. Across the USA, 52,852 players were invited to take part in the survey followed by a reminder; only 656 completed the survey, revealing a 4.2% response rate. A total of 16,474 parents/guardians were invited to take the survey, followed by a reminder; 848 parents completed the survey, revealing 9.2% response rate. However, both groups also revealed item nonresponse in responses to the benefits of tennis and commitment and loyalty questions. Therefore, the number of cases in descriptives of these scales are different in tables below. Data was analyzed using the descriptives, t-test, and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression analysis functions of IBM's SPSS version 24.0.

## **RESULTS**

Player respondents were 15.51 years old, on average (minimum age: 11, and maximum age: 18); while parent/guardian respondents were 47.22 years old, on average. Players' gender distribution was a little skewed towards males (53%) as opposed to females (45%) while 3% did not wish to identify. The opposite was the case for parents/guardians; skewed towards females (57%) as opposed to males (42%), while 1% did not wish to identify. The majority of players were Caucasian/white (66%), followed by Asian (13%), mixed ethnicity (8%), Hispanic (7%), African American/black (4%), and others (3%). Parents/guardians also had a similar distribution of

ethnicities, Caucasian/white (65%), Asian (9%), mixed ethnicity (9%), Hispanic (13%), and others (4%). 95% of parents/guardians were married, residing mostly in Texas, California, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, New York, South Carolina, Michigan, and New Jersey. Players also mostly resided in Texas, California, Florida, Georgia, Ohio, Michigan, and Minnesota. The majority (59%) of players' annual income was \$100K or above, while 84% of parents/guardians' annual income was in that bracket. 80% of players were high school graduates while 54% of parents/guardians were Master's or PhD degree holders followed by college graduates (38%). Parents had 2.28 children and players had 1.93 children in the household, on average.

Players' average years of involvement in tennis and parents'/guardians' average years of their children's involvement in tennis was a little over 10 years, 97% of players and 98% of parents/guardians' children being still involved in playing tennis. As for the people in the social circle involved in tennis, parents/guardians are involved themselves (72%), besides their partners/spouses (42.5%), other family members (39.7%), friends (56.3%), and neighbors (16.5%) while players' parents (45.7%), other family members (23.5%), friends (58.4%), and neighbors (6.7%) are also involved in tennis.

Tables 1 and 2 below show players' and parents' average agreement ratings on the perceived benefits of tennis that encourage players to play tennis, as well as players' and parents/guardians' children's commitment and loyalty to tennis. On the 7-point agreement scale, players' and parents' ratings of perceived benefits of tennis range between 3 and 6, on average. The top 3 perceived benefits of tennis are consistent between players and parents/guardians. Tennis promoting physical well-being, life skills, and being fun were well acknowledged as the top 3 features by both groups. Tennis as a popular e-sport and the popularity of tennis are two of the three lowest rated features by both players and parents. Additionally, tennis availability in public education system is also in the lowest rated three features of tennis for parents while tennis cool and fashionable clothing are among the third lowest rated benefit by players.

Players and parents are also similar on their ratings of player commitment and likelihood to continue playing tennis. On the 10-point scale, players' and parents' ratings of player commitment to tennis and likelihood to continue to play tennis are above 8, on average. These results show high commitment and loyalty to tennis.



**Table 1.** Descriptives of tennis players' agreement levels on the perceived benefits of tennis

<b>Perceived benefits of tennis encouraging players to play tennis</b> <b>1= Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>
Tennis improves the physical well-being of players	405	1	7	6.38	0.886
Tennis allows players to have fun	405	1	7	6.14	1.009
Tennis provides important life skills for players	405	1	7	5.92	1.141
Tennis is highly engaging because of constant contact with play	405	1	7	5.82	1.267
Tennis takes players away from indoor activities including technology	405	1	7	5.67	1.319
Tennis helps players to reach their full potential	405	1	7	5.60	1.158
Tennis improves the social well-being of players	405	1	7	5.53	1.236
Tennis is a safe sport to play	405	1	7	5.52	1.210
Tennis improves the psychological well-being of players	405	1	7	5.51	1.438
Tennis is available in public school educational system	405	1	7	5.47	1.851
Tennis offers good role models for players to look up to	405	1	7	5.37	1.326
Tennis has well known and highly credible coaches	405	1	7	5.24	1.418
Tennis is a family sport	405	1	7	5.07	1.426
Tennis offers players the chance to receive a college scholarship	405	1	7	4.83	1.686
Tennis is a good return on investment in time and money	405	1	7	4.46	1.597
Tennis has cool and fashionable clothing enticing players	405	1	7	4.40	1.612
Tennis makes players popular	405	1	7	3.93	1.359
Tennis is a popular e-sport encouraging players to play	405	1	7	3.82	1.548
<b>Players' commitment to tennis</b> 0=Extremely uncommitted, 10=Extremely committed	356	1	10	8.14	1.818
<b>Players' likelihood to continue playing tennis</b> 0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely	356	0	10	8.99	1.721

**Table 2.** Descriptives of tennis player parents'/guardians' agreement levels on the perceived benefits of tennis

Perceived benefits of tennis encouraging players to play tennis	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
<b>1= Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree</b>					
Tennis improves the physical well-being of players	635	1	7	6.29	0.911
Tennis provides important life skills for players	635	1	7	6.25	1.051
Tennis allows players to have fun	635	1	7	5.93	0.995
Tennis is a family sport	635	1	7	5.80	1.173
Tennis is highly engaging because of constant contact with play	635	1	7	5.71	1.265
Tennis takes players away from indoor activities including technology	635	1	7	5.71	1.296
Tennis is a safe sport to play	635	1	7	5.58	1.117
Tennis helps players to reach their full potential	635	1	7	5.55	1.037
Tennis improves the psychological well-being of players	635	1	7	5.52	1.259
Tennis improves the social well-being of players	635	1	7	5.48	1.254
Tennis offers good role models for players to look up to	635	1	7	5.24	1.172
Tennis has well known and highly credible coaches	635	1	7	4.89	1.271
Tennis offers players the chance to receive a college scholarship	635	1	7	4.51	1.448
Tennis is a good return on investment in time and money	635	1	7	4.18	1.514
Tennis has cool and fashionable clothing enticing players	635	1	7	3.94	1.370
Tennis is available in public school educational system	635	1	7	3.91	2.125
Tennis makes players popular	635	1	7	3.78	1.176
Tennis is a popular e-sport encouraging players to play	635	1	7	3.60	1.282
<b>Players' commitment to tennis</b>	590	1	10	8.18	1.678
0=Extremely uncommitted, 10=Extremely committed					
<b>Players' likelihood to continue playing tennis</b>	590	0	10	8.66	1.723
0=Extremely unlikely, 10=Extremely likely					

Table 3 displays the results of the t-test comparison of tennis players and player parents'/guardians' agreement levels on the perceived benefits of tennis. Out of 18 benefits of tennis, players and parents/guardians agree on half of them. Players' ratings are significantly higher than those of parents/guardians on seven of the scale items while the opposite is the case for tennis being a family sport and tennis providing important life skills. The perception is also similar on players' own commitment to tennis and parents'/guardians' perception of their children's commitment to tennis while players' likelihood to continue playing tennis is significantly higher than those of parents'/guardians' perception of their children's likelihood to do so.

**Table 3.** T-test comparison of tennis players and player parents’/guardians’ on the perceived benefits of tennis

<b>Perceived benefits of tennis encouraging players to play tennis</b> <b>1= Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Parents/Guardians mean</b>	<b>Players Mean</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>The difference</b>
Tennis is highly engaging because of constant contact with play	5.71	5.82	.167	No Difference
Tennis is available in public school educational system	3.91	5.47	.000	Players > Parents
Tennis provides important life skills for players	6.25	5.92	.000	Players < Parents
Tennis improves the psychological well-being of players	5.52	5.51	.867	No Difference
Tennis improves the physical well-being of players	6.29	6.38	.112	No Difference
Tennis improves the social well-being of players	5.48	5.53	.518	No Difference
Tennis makes players popular	3.78	3.93	.060	No Difference
Tennis offers players the chance to receive a college scholarship	4.51	4.83	.001	Players > Parents
Tennis offers good role models for players to look up to	5.24	5.37	.093	No Difference
Tennis takes players away from indoor activities including technology	5.71	5.67	.642	No Difference
Tennis helps players to reach their full potential	5.55	5.60	.488	No Difference
Tennis has cool and fashionable clothing enticing players	3.94	4.40	.000	Players > Parents
Tennis is a family sport	5.80	5.07	.000	Players < Parents
Tennis is a good return on investment in time and money	4.18	4.46	.005	Players > Parents
Tennis is a safe sport to play	5.58	5.52	.364	No Difference
Tennis allows players to have fun	5.93	6.14	.001	Players > Parents
Tennis has well known and highly credible coaches	4.89	5.24	.000	Players > Parents
Tennis is a popular e-sport encouraging players to play	3.60	3.82	.012	Players > Parents
Players' commitment to tennis	8.18	8.14	.646	No Difference
Players' likelihood to continue playing tennis	8.66	8.99	.002	Players > Parents

Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple regression analysis was used to identify which of the perceived benefits of tennis contribute to explaining players’ commitment and loyalty to tennis. Tables 4 and 5 show the significant variables explaining commitment and loyalty, respectively. As for commitment to tennis, important benefits for players are tennis providing important life skills, improving psychological well-being, helping players reach their full potential, offering a chance for college scholarship, being available in public school educational system, and being a safe sport to play, in that order of importance. Interestingly though, the influences of “tennis improves the psychological wellbeing of players” and “tennis is available in public school educational system” are negative. When it comes to loyalty to tennis in the form of likelihood to continue playing tennis, the only two defining factors are tennis being a good return on investment in time and money and improving the physical well-being of players. Since  $R^2$  values are rather low ( $<.2$ ), there seems other likely explanatory factors that were not included in the current study.

**Table 4.** OLS multiple regression analysis results on perceived benefits of tennis predicting players' commitment to tennis

<b>R<sup>2</sup> = .188 (preferred &gt; .25), Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .145, F = 4.340, p-value= .000</b>					
<b>Dependent variable: Players' commitment to tennis</b>	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>		<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p-value</b>
	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>		
<b>Predicting variables:</b>					
(Constant)	4.091	.831		4.923	.000
Tennis provides important life skills for players	.324	.112	.190	2.897	.004
Tennis improves the psychological wellbeing of players	-.240	.085	-.188	-2.808	.005
Tennis helps players to reach their full potential	.285	.121	.182	2.348	.019
Tennis offers players the chance to receive a college scholarship	.162	.065	.153	2.484	.013
Tennis is available in public school educational system	-.144	.052	-.147	-2.779	.006
Tennis is a safe sport to play	.214	.092	.140	2.319	.021

**Table 5.** OLS multiple regression analysis results on perceived benefits of tennis predicting players' loyalty to tennis

<b>R<sup>2</sup> = .126 (preferred &gt; .25), Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .079, F = 2.698, p-value= .000</b>					
<b>Dependent variable: Players' likelihood to continue playing tennis</b>	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>		<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p-value</b>
	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Beta</b>		
<b>Predicting variables:</b>					
(Constant)	5.325	.816		6.527	.000
Tennis is a good return on investment in time and money	.212	.075	.200	2.839	.005
Tennis improves the physical well-being of players	.325	.134	.159	2.421	.016

## IMPLICATIONS

### Theoretical Implications

The study depicted physical well-being, life skills, and fun as highly-rated perceived benefits for youth sport participation, thus supporting previous literature (Baron, 2007; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, and Keeler, 1993; Weiss, 2004). The study found these benefits, highly-rated by both players and parents/guardians, while supporting Theokas (2009) that sport offers shared activity, engagement, and fun between participants, parents, and community. The findings also contribute to the literature in terms of the not so popular benefits of tennis. For example, the lowest rated perceived benefits by both players and parents, namely tennis as a popular e-sport and the popularity of tennis, as well as tennis availability in public education system for parents and tennis is cool and fashionable clothing for players, indicate that these benefits may need

attention from tennis promoting organizations, as these noted were identified as variables of interest during the survey development by a major tennis association.

The current study results indicate that player commitment to tennis depends on tennis providing important life skills, improving psychological well-being, helping players reach their full potential, offering a chance for college scholarship, being available in public school educational system, and being a safe sport to play, while player loyalty depends on tennis being a good return on investment in time and money and improving the physical well-being of players. These perceived benefits are rather tangible benefits. The influence of “tennis is available in public school educational system” being negative is predictable since tennis is typically not a public school sport. On the other hand, the influence of “tennis improves the psychological wellbeing of players” being negative is surprising and may imply trials and tribulations of becoming good at this sport as well as getting into the sport as a process.

### **Managerial Implications**

Opportunities exist for the tennis and sport promoting organizations to focus marketing efforts on improving well-being, life skills, and fun in future communications for recruitment and retention of players. The results have implications specific to the leadership of tennis and sport organizations as tennis e-sport experiences can be enhanced to subsequently encourage more participation in traditional play. In addition, tennis promoting organizations may need to create programs to represent tennis in the public education system and make tennis more “cool” to increase its popularity. Tennis leader organizations may explore partnering with celebrities and popular brands to improve the brand perception of tennis apparel. Tennis coaches can also use these insights to retain their current junior players and further attract more to protect tennis as a lifetime sport enjoyed and valued by future generations.

The finding that players and parents’/guardians’ perception of tennis benefits are similar in nine items and players’ ratings are higher on seven items implies that players see more value in playing tennis than that of their parents/guardians. On the other hand, the study indicated that players’ appreciation of tennis as a family sport is not as great as their parents’ to improve important life skills as it lags behind their parents/guardians. Perceptual match between players and their parents/guardians about the benefits of tennis may be critical in acquiring player commitment and parental support in that commitment. Therefore, tennis promoting organizations may need to focus on the listed tennis benefits that indicate different perceptions between players and parents/guardians and study the causes of gaps.

Looking at the USA’s current landscape of junior tennis play, one automatically looks at how tennis fared during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some individual sports like tennis have prospered over the past two years due to the nature of the sport offering physical activity safely (Tennis Industry Association, 2022). According to the Physical Activity Council study, 2020 and 2021, there has been an increase in tennis players playing one time per year to over 4 million players nationwide (Tennis Industry Association, 2022). This increase in tennis participation has not been seen since the Battle of the Sexes Tennis Match between Bobby Riggs and Billie Jean King in 1972 (Allen, Townsend, and Davies, 2021). Tennis coaches and providers are trying to keep up with the increased demand and in parallel, looking at strategies to retain these new and lapsed players. With the increase in tennis play and the need for retention, coaches could use this

research for ideas. As stated above, both parents and players aligned around the top three benefits of playing tennis: physical well-being, life skills, and fun development.

The perceived benefit of tennis as an opportunity to engage in physical well-being have been highlighted during the Pandemic. Tennis coaches can leverage this benefit to retain and keep attracting new players by showcasing tennis as an avenue for youth to obtain their physical activity requirements and keep doing so into adulthood. The acquiring of life skills can be sandwiched with physical well-being and following a holistic approach to parents supporting continued participation.

### **Limitations and Future Research Suggestions**

With the U.S.T.A.'s guidance, the benefits of tennis were measured by asking respondents "perceived benefits of tennis encouraging players to play tennis." If respondents were asked to simply rate the importance of the benefits of tennis, the results may be different, which can be delved into in future research. Also,  $R^2$  values lower than .2 in regression analyses vindicate that there are likely additional and more important explanatory factors that were not included in the current study. These factors may be family, sibling, or friend related and need to be identified in future research. Intangible perceived benefits such as fun and enjoyment are identified to influence sport commitment in past research (Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, and Keeler, 1993) while it was not supported in the current study. Fun from the perspectives of players, parents, and coaches may differ. Visek et al. (2015) identified 82 fun determinants of fun for player retention from the perspectives of coaches and parents. These determinants of fun may have a role in inducing commitment and loyalty to tennis and need attention in future research.

Additionally, future research on youth tennis could explore the impact of coaches and mentors and their respective attitudes and philosophies on youth sport commitment, loyalty, and burnout. Gould (2010) and Gould and Carson (2014) found parents support early specialization in sport to increase college scholarship opportunities. Harwood and Knight (2009) found parents' roles begin to decrease during the specialization stage as coaches play a larger role. Often, teenagers will find themselves spending more time with their coach than their own parents. Harwood and Knight (2009) also found coaches who support and praise positively affect youth initiative towards sport in addition to developing positive self-perceptions. Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand and Briere (2001) found that coaches who are less controlling and gave their athletes more autonomy were able to enhance intrinsic motivation, resulting in continued player engagement with their sport. Pelletier et al (2001), however, found swimmers and football players who dropped out of sport noted their coaches as less encouraging and supportive. Rottensteiner, Laakso, Pihlaja and Kontinen (2013) suggested that youth athletes abandon sports due to a negative coaching experience and added poor coaching may create undesirable self-images and may deliver negative feedback in a demotivating way.

Similar findings are revealed in tennis context as well. Knight and Holt (2014) developed a grounded theory regarding the optimal level of parent/guardian involvement in youth tennis. Tennis was selected because it is an individual, not team, sport and also historically requires elevated financial and time commitment from parents. Findings of the study revealed that parents should discover their children's goals for playing sport, identify facets their children are struggling with, and their children's wishes as to parental involvement. Previous research in tennis (Knight et al., 2010) and team sports (Knight, Neely, and Holt, 2011) depicted children

prefer their parent's behavior to be respectable and to elicit positive body language and encouragement. Additionally, children do not want their parents to be obnoxious, coach during games, or make discouraging comments. Furthermore, children prefer their parents target effort above performance and to not get personally involved with on the field activities by acting as the coach or referee once the competition begins. Lastly, children indicated they welcomed positive feedback from their parents once the competition has finished. The influence of different parental behaviors on player commitment and loyalty towards tennis needs attention in future research.

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