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8 Strategies Used and Assistance Required to Facilitate Children's Involvement in Tennis: Parents'

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Perspectives

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17 [tennis-parentsrsquo-perspectives](http://journals.humankinetics.com/tsp-back-issues/tsp-volume-27-issue-3-september/strategies-used-and-assistance-required-to-facilitate-childrens-quos-involvement-in-tennis-parentsrsquo-perspectives)

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to (a) identify the strategies parents use to be able to support their children's involvement in competitive tennis and (b) identify additional assistance parents require to better facilitate their children's involvement in tennis. Interviews were conducted with 41 parents of junior players in the United States. Data analysis led to the identification of four strategies parents used to be able to support to their children: Spouses working together, interacting with other parents, selecting an appropriate coach, and researching information. Five areas where parents required additional assistance were also identified. These were understanding and negotiating player progression, education on behaving and encouraging players at tournaments, evaluating and selecting coaches, identifying and accessing financial support, and managing and maintaining schooling. These findings indicated that parents 'surrounded themselves with support' to facilitate their children's involvement in tennis, but required additional information regarding specific aspects of tennis parenting.

1 **Strategies Used and Assistance Required to Facilitate Children's Involvement in Tennis:**
2 **Parents' Perspectives**

3 Parents are extremely important in youth sport, providing children with support to enable
4 them to participate and progress (Horn & Horn, 2007; Wuerth, Alfermann, & Lee, 2004). Such
5 support is provided through parents financing their children's involvement, transporting children
6 to training and competition, comforting children when they have lost or are injured, and
7 providing children with information about future careers, schooling options, and their sporting
8 performance (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Morgan &
9 Giacobbi, 2006; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Parents also provide support to their children when
10 they are at competitions. Such support might include the provision of practical advice, providing
11 children with feedback regarding their attitude and effort, and displaying positive body language
12 (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2006; 2008; Knight, Boden, & Holt, 2010; Knight,
13 Neely, & Holt, 2011; Omli & Weise-Bjornstal, 2011).

14 When parents provide appropriate support for their children it is associated with a range
15 of positive outcomes, such as enjoyment, higher perceptions of competence, long-term
16 involvement, enhanced motivation, and achievement of an elite status in sport (Brustad, 1993;
17 Côté, 1999; Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavalley, 2009; Leff & Hoyle, 1995; McCarthy, Jones,
18 & Clark-Carter, 2008; Power & Woolger, 1994). On the other hand, when parents provide
19 inappropriate types of support to their children (e.g., place pressure upon children or hold
20 unrealistic expectations for children) it can be associated with a range of negative outcomes,
21 including heightened anxiety, fear of failure, conflict between parents and children, and dropout
22 (Bois, Lalanne, & Delforge, 2009; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Le Bars, Gernigon, &

1 Ninot, 2009; Sager & Lavallee, 2010). Given the consequences of parental support, it appears
2 that it is an important area of study.

3 Although considerable attention has been given to examining parents' provision of
4 support and the consequences of providing such support, less attention has been given to what
5 parents do to be able to provide the necessary support. For example, although it has been
6 recognized that parents need to commit time to transport children to training and competitions,
7 less is known about what strategies or resources parents need or use to be able to make this time
8 commitment. Some evidence has indicated that parents have to find ways to structure their lives
9 in order to support their children in sport (Côté, 1999; Kirk et al., 1997a; Lauer, Gould, Roman,
10 & Pierce, 2010a; 2010b; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). One of the most obvious examples of this is
11 displayed through parents changing their working day or employment. That is, parents have
12 indicated they might choose to work shorter days, not take promotions, work in occupations that
13 have flexible hours, and not stay late at work so they were available to take their children to
14 training and competitions (e.g., Côté, 1999; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b; Kirk et al.,
15 1997a; Lauer et al., 2010a; 2010b). Additionally, in some families only one parent will work, so
16 the other parent can complete the tasks (such as transporting their children to training) associated
17 with having a child participating in youth sport (Côté, 1999; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Kirk et al.,
18 1997a; 1997b; Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006; Wolfenden & Holt. 2005).

19 Parents have also recalled making changes to their family schedule and structure to
20 ensure that children are able to attend training and competitions (Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough,
21 2009; van Rossum, 1995). For example, family meal times are often replaced with fast, easy
22 meals, sometimes eaten in cars or at practice venues (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Siblings might be
23 split between parents, with one parent being responsible for transporting a child to training, while

1 the other parent transports siblings to their activities (Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b;
2 Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Family holidays may also be cancelled or organized to take place at
3 sport venues so as not to interfere with sporting schedules (Côté, 1999; Dorsch et al., 2009;
4 Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006).

5 Changes to work and family schedules are made to ensure parents have sufficient time to
6 commit to their children's sporting schedules. However, such changes could have other
7 implications for parents. For example, having only one parent work or reducing the amount of
8 time parents' work will have financial implications for parents (Harwood & Knight, 2009a;
9 2009b; Kirk et al., 1997b). In addition to reduced working time, parents often spend considerable
10 amounts of money to allow their children to participate in sport (Kirk et al., 1997b). As such,
11 parents might change their spending habits to be able to finance their children's involvement. For
12 example, parents have indicated they might restrict their own social lives to ensure they can
13 finance their children's participation (Côté, 1999; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b; Wolfenden
14 & Holt, 2005).

15 The aforementioned literature clearly illustrates a variety of strategies parents use to be
16 able to provide the necessary support (particularly tangible support) to help their children
17 participate and progress in sport. To date, the strategies that have been identified have, generally,
18 focused on the changes parents make within the family unit to be able to provide tangible support
19 to their children (e.g., Côté, 1999; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Kirk et al., 1997a; 1997b; Morgan &
20 Giacobbi, 2006; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). However, it is well known that in addition to tangible
21 support, parents provide emotional and informational support to their children. But, little is
22 known about the strategies parents develop to be able to provide these types of support to their
23 children. Additionally, one might anticipate that parents also develop strategies that extend

1 beyond the family unit. For example, in a study of talent development in youth tennis,
2 Wolfenden and Holt (2005) identified that parents and coaches worked as a team to be able to
3 provide the necessary support to help children progress. It is also feasible to imagine parents use
4 different strategies to help provide support beyond money and time. Thus, one of the aims of the
5 current study is to extend our knowledge of the strategies parents use to be able to provide the
6 necessary support to their children in sport.

7 In addition to understanding how parents find ways to provide support to their children,
8 identifying any additional help parents need to be able to support their children in sport might
9 also be useful given the range of challenges 'sport parents' face (Harwood & Knight, 2009a;
10 2009b; Kirk et al., 1997a; 1997b; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). For example, a study conducted by
11 Wiersma and Fifer (2008) with parents of youth sport showed parents found providing
12 instrumental and emotional support to their children particularly challenging. The provision of
13 instrumental support was challenging due to the consequences it had on general family life and
14 parents' ability to fulfill other parenting responsibilities. Challenges associated with providing
15 emotional support arose because parents were unsure of how to support their children in difficult
16 situations.

17 Similar findings were identified in a series of studies examining stressors parents of
18 youth tennis players and footballers encountered (Harwood, Drew, & Knight, 2010; Harwood &
19 Knight, 2009a; 2009b). Through these studies it emerged that parents encountered a range of
20 stressors associated with competitions (e.g., watching matches, logistical concerns),
21 organizational factors (e.g., financial concerns, time issues, coaching issues), and developmental
22 issues (e.g., sport progression, academic concerns). Overall, one of the most consistent issues
23 parents expressed across these three studies was not knowing what to do in different situations

1 (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b). That is, parents indicated they did not
 2 know what to do to be able to best support their children.

3 Recognising the challenges parents can face as they attempt to provide support to their
 4 children and the fact that parents are often unsure of how to best support their children, the
 5 purpose of this study is twofold. The purposes of this study were to (a) identify the strategies
 6 parents use to be able to support their children's involvement in competitive tennis and (b)
 7 identify additional assistance parents require to better facilitate their children's involvement in
 8 tennis.

9 **Method**

10 **Participants**

11 The sample was comprised of 41 parents from the United States. The United States is
 12 split into 17 geographical sections for tennis. Children are allocated a ranking in the section
 13 where they reside based on their results at tournaments. The parents were purposefully sampled
 14 (Patton, 2002) based on the age of their child (10-16 years) and the standard of their child (in the
 15 top 25 in their section or higher). The sampling criteria were selected to help ensure parents had
 16 supported their children to relatively high levels in tennis. Thus, these criteria enabled us to
 17 recruit participants who were 'information-rich' cases and could provide detailed accounts of
 18 relevant experiences to fulfill the purposes of this study.

19 There were 24 mothers and 17 fathers of 25 female players and 33 male players. At the
 20 time of the interviews all participants had *at least one* child aged between 10 and 16 (M age of
 21 children = 13.25 years, $SD = 2.35$) participating in tennis. All children were in the top 25 in their
 22 section and, of these players, 25 were ranked in the top 65 for their age group in the entire United

1 States. On average, the participants' children had been involved in tennis for 7.7 years ($SD =$
2 3.72).

3 Forty of the 41 participants were in two parent families. Of the 40 parents in two-parent
4 families, one of these parents was in a second marriage. Sixteen of the families had only one
5 child, 13 had two children, eight had three children, and four had more than three children. **The**
6 **age of the children in the families ranged from eight-24 years.**

7 **Procedure**

8 Institutional Research Ethics Board approval was obtained and permission to conduct the
9 study was gained from the tennis managers and coaches at two regional training centers in the
10 United States. Coaches at each center were given the sampling criteria, the study information
11 letter, and informed consent forms to distribute to potential participants. Interested participants
12 contacted the lead author (via e-mail) to schedule an interview during fieldwork trips to each
13 center. On arriving at each center, additional participants were recruited by the lead author while
14 they were watching their children practice. Prior to the interviews all participants provided
15 written informed consent. They were reminded their participation was voluntary, all information
16 was confidential, and were given an opportunity to ask questions.

17 **Data Collection**

18 Data were collected via individual semi-structured interviews lasting, on average, 50
19 minutes ($SD = 13$ minutes). The interview guide was structured based on the guidelines provided
20 by Rubin and Rubin (2005) and the questions informed by previous studies of parenting in tennis
21 (e.g., Gould et al., 2008, Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b; Knight et al., 2010). Two pilot
22 interviews were conducted with parents to refine the interview guide, which is provided in the
23 appendix. Data from the pilot interviews were not included in the analysis.

1 **Data Analysis**

2 Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in 902 pages of
3 single-spaced data. Transcripts were read and re-read by the lead author to ensure immersion in
4 the data. Analysis was conducted following the process presented by Miles and Huberman
5 (1994) whereby data is reduced through coding, data displays are developed, and conclusions are
6 drawn and verified based on the data displays and the transcripts. Data reduction was carried out
7 by selecting and abstracting meaningful units of data from the transcripts. That is, excerpts from
8 the interview transcripts were reviewed and units of data that appeared meaningful (i.e., words or
9 sentences that related to the research purposes) were identified and allocated codes. Initially
10 transcripts were coded using descriptive codes, which simply describe the content of the data and
11 involve little interpretation. For example, when participants discussed other parents, descriptive
12 codes such as talking to other parents and making friends with parents were allocated to the data.
13 Once descriptive codes had been developed, interpretive codes were assigned to the data.
14 Interpretive codes are more abstract than descriptive codes and involve the integration of
15 multiple ideas and background information. Interpretive codes in this study included seeking
16 guidance from other parents and other parents as a distraction. Finally, pattern codes were
17 allocated to the data. Pattern codes are more inferential and explanatory, and illustrate
18 relationships between interpretive codes. The final patterns codes are presented in the results.

19 After the initial coding occurred, data displays (“A visual format that presents
20 information systematically,” Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 91) of the codes were developed to
21 help identify how the codes fitted together. Two types of data displays were used in this study:
22 Data networks and data matrices. Data networks are “a collection of ‘nodes’ or points connected
23 by lines” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 94). Data networks were used during the earlier stages of

1 data analysis to help the authors visually depict how codes fitted together and develop pattern
2 codes. Once data networks had been developed and the pattern codes had been developed, data
3 matrices were developed. Data matrices are “essentially a ‘crossing’ of two lists, set up as rows
4 and columns” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 93). Data matrices were particularly useful in
5 allowing the comparison of specific codes across the entire set of participants. Two data matrices
6 summarizing data relating to the two purposes of the study were created and are available from
7 the first author upon request.

8 **Methodological Rigor**

9 Steps were taken during and following data collection to enhance the methodological
10 rigor of this study (see Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Specifically, three
11 strategies (two during and two following data collection) were incorporated in the study to
12 enhance methodological rigor. First, audio-files of the interview(s) conducted on the previous
13 day were reviewed prior to the interview(s) conducted the next day and emerging ideas were
14 recorded. By integrating audio analysis during the data collection phase, the authors ensured the
15 data being collected would answer their research questions (e.g., data was focused on the support
16 parents needed rather than the support they provided to children). Second, during the process of
17 data collection and analysis a reflexive journal was also maintained by the lead author to record
18 emerging ideas and thoughts regarding the data (Patton, 2002). This helped ensure biases and
19 pre-existing ideas were identified during the research process, which was important because the
20 lead author was a former competitive tennis player and had completed previous research
21 examining parenting in tennis. For example, through the maintenance of the reflexive journal, the
22 lead author became aware that she was becoming overly concerned with examples of negative

1 parental behaviors rather than focusing on the topic of concern. By reflecting on this, the author
2 was able to redirect her attention to the appropriate questions.

3 Finally, during data analysis the second author was presented with the data displays and
4 provided with verbal and written explanations of the emerging codes. The two authors engaged
5 in extensive discussions about the results, seeking to ensure a balanced, comprehensive, and
6 explanatory account was created – one that would be clear to someone not familiar with the
7 original data or the subculture of junior tennis. Then, acting as an inter-rater reliability check, the
8 second author was given a list of the codes and a sample of quotes. Although the two authors
9 agreed on the coding of the majority of the data, the second author questioned the production of
10 the pattern codes and the coding of the quotes to help ensure the codes had been allocated to
11 discrete and self-contained units of data. This questioning and justification of data allocation
12 continued throughout the process of writing the results.

13 **Results**

14 In the following sections the categories that depict the strategies participants used to be
15 able to support their children's involvement in tennis are presented. Challenges associated with
16 these strategies are also reported in the interest of providing a balanced account. Next, areas
17 participants wanted additional assistance with are presented.

18 **Strategies Parents Adopted to Facilitate their Children's Tennis Involvement**

19 **Spouses Working Together.** One strategy that helped participants facilitate their
20 children's tennis involvement was working 'as a team' with their spouse (all but one of the
21 participants in this study were in two-parent families). For example, the mother of two national
22 junior players explained that she and her husband were, "a team...Not only the support,
23 communication, or committing time to each other, but really working together" (P28). For

1 example, the mother of one of the highest nationally ranked juniors explained the distinct roles
2 she and her husband fulfilled. In their family the father, “spent [name of son’s] whole childhood
3 at tournaments. He was gone every week, at least two or three weekends a month.” While the
4 father travelled with the son, the mother has, “sort of been the IMG sports manager...registering
5 for tournaments...trying to understand each of the systems... and then making the travel
6 arrangements, getting the hotel with two double beds, finding the lowest airfare...” (P37).

7 By sharing these tasks parents described being better able to fulfill the extensive demands
8 associated with having a child playing tennis. Participants were also able to avoid tasks they
9 found particularly stressful or challenging. For example, when discussing attendance at
10 tournaments, one mother explained, “No, my husband goes [to tournaments], I always have him
11 take my daughter. I don’t like to take her” (P23). By sharing responsibilities participants could
12 avoid tasks they did not like but still ensure their children had sufficient support to progress.

13 **Interacting with Other Parents.** Participants often interacted with other parents to find
14 ways in which they could facilitate their children’s involvement in tennis. For example,
15 participants turned to other parents for advice and information when their children initially
16 became involved in the sport. As one mother said:

17 I talked to [other] parents a lot about tennis...I feel like you learn a lot from other parents,
18 what they’ve done. Especially with kids at different levels so I think that’s [important]. I
19 definitely tried to make time for most of her lessons to be there by the courts... then I
20 could sort of talk to the parents...meet the other families (P29).

21 However, participants cautioned against blindly copying other parents. This was
22 illustrated by one mother who explained the negative effect copying other parents’ behaviors had
23 on her daughter’s tennis:

1 You know you see other parents getting results by yelling at kids during and after matches,
2 getting them to perform. So as a bystander I would see it and think, “OK she’s getting
3 results, maybe this is the method I should use.” So I adopted some methods that were
4 really bad and didn’t work. I found out later all it did was make her hate the sport (P7).
5 Similarly, whereas many participants said parents helped each other, a caveat was that some
6 parents were viewed as being secretive and unhelpful. As one father recalled, “I don’t think that
7 all parents are forthright when they talk to you, ‘cause they’re always fearful of your kid being
8 better than theirs” (P26). Thus, although parents relied on the advice of other parents to support
9 their own children, they cautioned against relying on their information too much.

10 In addition to gaining information from parents, participants also sought other parents for
11 support in terms of friendship and camaraderie. The mother of a national male player explained,
12 “It’s funny, you’ll find the same group of friends, you kinda make a group of friends and, you
13 know, we text each other and you know we help each other out” (P20). Such friendships
14 appeared particularly helpful at tournaments, as many participants found these to be challenging
15 experiences. By developing friendships with other parents, participants were able to distract
16 themselves from the anxiety they may experience when watching their child compete.

17 **Selecting an Appropriate Coach.** Another way participants were able to support their
18 children was by finding coaches who were not just technically proficient but also had the skills
19 and education to provide a holistic training program to help children develop as players and
20 people. For example, one mother explained how she selected a coach that would completely
21 manage her son’s tennis development. She said:

22 I don’t want to be his [son’s] obstacle. So, I told him [his coach], “I expect you to manage
23 him, not just to train him also manage him, what he needs, the overall package, because I

1 don't know. I have no clue in sport, OK I played, but never, you know, never professional
2 and I have no clue what to do. You have to, you have to come and tell me he needs this, he
3 needs this, he needs this. I don't even know when he needs to change racquets, I don't
4 know... so you come and tell me what I should do" (P30).

5 Participants also sought out coaches who would provide *parents themselves* with guidance
6 and support. A father explained, "A good coach is coaching parents, they share their experience
7 and what they have learned" (P24). Similarly, a father explained the "coach is very important to
8 tell parents what [the] kid needs right now to develop their game for the next level" (P22). In
9 particular, participants sought coaches who could provide them with emotional support to help
10 them cope with the challenges associated with being a tennis parent. As the father of two
11 nationally ranked players said, "You've got to cry on their [coaches'] shoulders cause they're the
12 ones that you rely on and that's what I'm paying them to do, to help" (P26). Participants' need
13 for emotional support from coaches appeared particularly necessary when children had lost or
14 had difficult tournament experiences.

15 Participants also proactively sought help from coaches. For example, one mother asked her
16 daughter's coach to talk to her husband about his inappropriate behavior at tournaments. Her
17 daughter came home saying:

18 "I just wish dad would stop telling me [what to do] and trying to be a coach." So I went to
19 [name of coach], I said, "Is there any way you could talk to [husband] and tell him like he
20 is dad, be her dad not her coach?" And he's like, "I'll talk to him" (P19).

21 **Researching Information.** Many participants recognized they needed to "become students
22 of the game" (P14), educating themselves about tennis and how to be a tennis parent. For
23 example, participants discussed learning about tennis psychology. One mother said:

1 The mental aspect of tennis is very important, and that's where I decided to read these
2 books and get a little bit more information. Being that my kids are pretty young, it's hard
3 for them to pick up these books and read it and understand it, so you listen to the TV, you
4 listen to the things that other players experience and try to draw from that (P7).

5 A father explained how he went about educating himself on tennis technique. He said "I would
6 go on YouTube and we would just like type in like 'Federer's forehand' or something and we
7 would watch it. We're trying to become more knowledgeable that way 'cause I really don't know
8 anything about tennis" (P18). In addition to using the Internet, parents also read autobiographies
9 of tennis players and their parents because, "it's always good to read more about it [tennis] you
10 know, from people who do have experience" (P4).

11 **Additional Help Parents Required to Facilitate Children's Involvement in Tennis**

12 **Understanding and Negotiating Player Progression.** Although participants gained
13 information about tennis from a range of sources, they all highlighted a need for *more*
14 information regarding how to help their child progress. They wanted information related to
15 starting and progressing in tournaments. Such information was desired because participants had
16 difficulties understanding the tournament structure (the different tournament levels that children
17 progress through as they improve in tennis) and choosing which tournaments to enter. For
18 example, summarizing the additional help he would like, one father said:

19 Like I mentioned before, how to choose the tournament you know, that would be [a] great
20 help and that, provided information about ah, the most important tournaments and
21 tournaments that have the best facilities, direction on that (P4).

22 The second area participants indicated needing more information about was obtaining
23 college scholarships. Participants appeared unsure of how to actually help their children at this

1 stage of their career because they did not always know what was required to achieve a college
2 scholarship. As one mother said, "Tennis costs about 30 grand a year at this level with travel and
3 coaching, it's a year's college tuition... so we're looking at college scholarships... what kind of
4 support is there? Talking and guessing?" (P9). Another mother stated, "Nobody knows what is
5 going on, where and when selections for colleges happen... parents need to know more" (P13).

6 **Education About Behaving and Encouraging Children at Tournaments.** Participants
7 indicated that parental education would be helpful because they often felt unprepared to provide
8 support to their children at tournaments. A mother explained, "We have to find out for ourselves
9 each time when we face some situation, we have to find out the answer ourselves and we are not
10 prepared" (P14). She later returned to this issue:

11 Every tournament something new pops up, you know, like the last time it was cheating,
12 the time before he [son] lost and was discouraged and he said he didn't want to play any
13 more, you know it's like everytime something, yeah, something new to figure out.

14 Rather than having to just 'figure out' what to do participants indicated they would benefit from
15 being advised how they could provide feedback after matches. For example, when discussing
16 supporting her son after matches, one mother said:

17 It would be nice if somebody came and just told me these answers, 'cause it would make
18 my life a lot easier. 'Cause there are times when, you know, I try not to be hard on him
19 ...But there should be a tennis 101, you know, for parents and kids (P15).

20 Overall, participants perceived that educating parents about their behaviors at tournaments and
21 how to emotionally support their children would ensure parents were better prepared to create
22 positive and beneficial tournament experiences for their children.

1 **Selecting and Evaluating Coaches.** Although participants emphasized the importance of
2 finding the right coach for their children, they described having little guidance or information
3 regarding how to select an appropriate coach. As one parent explained:

4 Well the parents are on their own. Literally it's a trial by fire. You try this coach, you try
5 that coach until you get to the right guy. I was fortunate enough to, the first personal
6 coach that [name of child] had was a very good guy, he taught him very well (P12).

7 Unfortunately, not all the participants had been so successful at selecting a coach. For example,
8 repeating a story provided by many, one mother said, "We had tried a lot of programs and they
9 were terrible. They were basically money makers with no real good coaching" (P3).

10 Participants thought more information from the USTA regarding how to select coaches or
11 assess the quality of coaches would be beneficial. For example, one father suggested, "Maybe
12 there could be a rating system, maybe the parents could say 'I like this coach or this coach is
13 good for this or that.' That should be something that the USTA should think about" (P26).

14 Advocating for a similar idea, another mother said, "It would be very helpful to have a summary
15 of what each one [coach] offers, what their caliber is, what kind of students they coach, their
16 strengths, their styles... I think it would be awesome" (P27). Overall, participants perceived that
17 having access to more evaluative information about coaches would allow them to make informed
18 choices regarding their children's coach, allowing them to provide the best support to their
19 children.

20 **Identifying and Accessing Funding Opportunities.** Competitive tennis is expensive,
21 particularly as children reach higher national and international levels. For example, the mother of
22 a top national player discussed the costs of paying for her son and his coach to travel:

1 The biggest issue with tennis is it costs too much. You know to go to the tournaments,
2 that [player's junior world ranking] was about a \$20,000-\$25,000 [per year]. A one-week
3 tournament \$2000, [and] close to \$4000 for a 10-day tournament. You know, somebody
4 asked me that once, "what do I spend?" "I said "with [name of coach] and [name of child]
5 travelling a ballpark of \$2000-\$2500 a week," and I mean if they go to Mexico with that
6 airfare [it's] expensive, \$5000 a week, and this is juniors! (P37).

7 Given the expense of tennis, some participants indicated they had to restrict the opportunities
8 they provided to their children. As one father said, "I don't have that kind of money to pick up
9 with my kid and have him all over the place playing tournaments. I would be broke" (P11).

10 Participants provided numerous suggestions for how the USTA and clubs could help
11 reduce some of the costs associated with tennis. For example, one participant thought tennis
12 should be subsidized, "You would think that the USTA would like you know try to help
13 subsidize some of that [the travel costs] with the parents who really want their kid to play tennis
14 but they don't" (P12). Another participant said, "One of the things I think that the USTA could
15 do is provide more scholarships and stuff for parents that need the money to take their kids
16 through that journey cause it's an expensive sport" (P7)..

17 **Managing and Maintaining Schooling.** Given the time commitment associated with
18 tennis, some participants discussed the difficulties associated with maintaining their children's
19 schooling. The main difficulties were negotiating time for their children to miss school for
20 tournaments and balancing homework and training requirements. As one mother said, her main
21 difficulty in supporting her son had been him, "missing classes, I mean it's [name of city] you
22 don't miss school, I mean we've had to lie to go to a National tournament and we're lying to a
23 [religious-based] School, that's just great!" (P37).

1 extended beyond the family unit. These strategies appeared to help parents not only provide the
2 necessary tangible support (e.g., money and time), but also informational and emotional support.
3 To be better able to support their children, parents indicated that they required more tennis-
4 specific information.

5 Overall, the results of this study indicate that the support parents are able to provide to
6 their children is, to an extent, influenced by the knowledge, understanding, and general support
7 parents themselves receive from those around them. In other words, the parents in this study
8 appeared to surround themselves with support so they could facilitate their children's
9 involvement in tennis. This idea is consistent with research from developmental psychology,
10 which has shown the support parents access can positively influence the quality of their
11 parenting, along with their perceptions of stress, mental health, and even their children's
12 development (e.g., Belsky, 1984; Koeske & Koeske, 1990).

13 Previous research has highlighted a number of strategies parents use within the family
14 unit to be able to facilitate their children's involvement in sport (e.g., sharing tasks, altering work
15 commitments) (Côté, 1999; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Kirk et al., 1997a; 1997b; Morgan & Giacobbi,
16 2006; Wolfenden & Holt. 2005). Our finding that spouses worked together corroborates these
17 previous studies. However, the current findings point to an additional benefit of parents working
18 together to support their children. That is, by sharing tasks parents could avoid tasks they did not
19 enjoy or found challenging (e.g., attending competitions). Studies examining parental
20 involvement and behaviors at competitions have indicated that the quality of emotional support
21 parents can provide to their children might be influenced by their experience and emotions (e.g.,
22 Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b; Knight & Holt, in press). Thus, extrapolating from previous
23 research and the current findings, a practical implication for sport psychology consultants is to

1 work with parents to identify ways in which spouses can support each other and identify the
2 tasks that are more or less suited to each of the parents. By addressing such issues with parents
3 consultants can help ensure that parents are able to provide the appropriate and necessary
4 emotional support to their children.

5 Beyond the family unit, the parents in the current study indicated they were reliant on
6 their child's coach and other parents to be able to support their child in tennis. One of the
7 strategies that might be underutilized within youth sport is the concept of parents supporting
8 parents. Previous research has indicated that 'inappropriate' parental behaviors or interactions
9 can cause parents stress and that inappropriate parental behaviors at youth sport competitions
10 might arise due to rivalries or disagreements between parents (Harwood & Knight, 2009a;
11 2009b). As such, particularly at competitions, it has often been advocated that parents sit apart
12 and limit their interactions (cf. Streaan, 1995). However, the findings of this study actually run
13 counter to these suggestions and highlight the potential benefits for parents of encouraging
14 interactions between parents to help reduce anxiety at competitions and provide parents with
15 necessary information.

16 Consistent with the findings of Wolfenden and Holt (2005), the current study also points
17 to the importance of parents and coaches being able to work together to support children in sport.
18 Participants in the current study wanted coaches to provide guidance regarding their children's
19 overall tennis program, support their development as people, and provide parents themselves
20 with emotional and tangible help when they faced difficulties. When examining previous studies,
21 particularly those which have focused almost exclusively upon the family unit (e.g., Côté, 1999),
22 it is apparent that parents have developed strategies to be able to provide tangible support to
23 children. The findings of the current study extend this research by highlighting parents use of and

1 need for strategies to gain emotional, informational, and social support to be able to provide
2 informational and emotional support to their children. That is, the parents in the current study
3 indicated that they used their spouse, other parents and their child's coach as a source of
4 emotional support. By using others for emotional support, parents were then able to provide the
5 appropriate emotional support to their children. Thus, understanding that parents seek their own
6 support to be able to provide emotional and informational support, in addition to tangible support
7 to their children might be useful to guide consultants' work with parents.

8 Parents spent extensive amounts of time researching information. Previous studies have
9 shown coaches sometimes interpret parents turning to other sources of information as a lack of
10 trust in their coaching abilities (Gould et al., 2006; 2008; Knight & Harwood, 2009b). However,
11 the parents in the current study did not seem to be researching additional information because
12 they did not trust coaches. Rather, it appeared researching information provided parents with
13 more knowledge, which they thought allowed them to provide better support to their children. In
14 fact, despite parents' best efforts to obtain information from a range of sources, they still wanted
15 more tennis-specific information.

16 The five areas of additional assistance parents wanted were all forms of informational
17 support. Parents highlighted a need for more information to help them, understand how children
18 progress in tennis, behave appropriately at tournaments, evaluate and select coaches, access
19 funding, and make decisions regarding schooling. Dorsch and colleagues (2009) recently
20 identified that one of the main changes parents undergo when their children participate in sport is
21 a change in their cognition – particularly their knowledge about sport. Although parents'
22 knowledge of sport is likely to increase through their children's participation in sport, it was
23 apparent in the current study that parents would prefer to be provided with pertinent information

1 ahead of time, rather than learning as they went through the experience. The amount of pertinent
2 information parents have about their child's sport is likely to underpin the effectiveness and
3 efficiency of all the other support they provide to their children. For example, if parents have
4 information regarding how to behave at competitions, they can provide better emotional support
5 to their children. Similarly, if parents are aware of the appropriate amount of training and
6 tournaments their children should engage in at different stages in their career, they can ensure
7 they provide the necessary tangible support at different stages. As such, working to identify the
8 information parents need and providing this information in easily accessible forms appears
9 crucial to ensure parents can best help their children participate and progress in sport.

10 Recognizing the importance of an extended support network for parents, it appears that
11 parents might benefit from a greater emphasis upon developing a youth sport environment in
12 which multiple individuals are working together to support each other. Sport psychology
13 consultants may be able to use this idea of surrounding parents with support to help parents
14 overcome some of the challenges they associate with being "sport parents" (Harwood & Knight,
15 2009a; 2009b). For example, consultants could work with parents to help them identify who they
16 can turn to for support and how this support can be helpful. By understanding the resources that
17 are available to them parents might feel more confident to cope with the extensive demands that
18 can arise in youth sport. Consultants could also work directly with coaches to help them
19 understand the importance of the support they provide to parents. Unfortunately, parents are
20 often seen as "something" for coaches to "deal with" and a distraction from the coaching role
21 (Gould et al., 2006; Knight & Harwood, 2010). Consultants could help overcome this perception
22 by working with coaches to illustrate the benefits that athletes, parents, and coaches themselves
23 will gain if coaches provide appropriate and necessary support to parents. Finally, consultants

1 could also work directly with sports organizations to help them understand parents need for
2 information and the important role organizations play in ensuring that coaches have the skills to
3 communicate with and support parents.

4 The current findings must be considered against the limitations of the study. Data were
5 collected via fieldwork trips to two tennis centers in the United States – thus, they may not be
6 representative of parents' experiences at different centers. Given that participants volunteered to
7 discuss their parenting and there were few examples of the negative stereotype of the 'pushy'
8 tennis parent, there may have been a risk of sampling bias. Another limitation was parents' data
9 were not triangulated or compared with data from players, coaches, clubs, or representatives
10 from the USTA. Finally, information about family income was not obtained, which may have
11 been an oversight because of the high financial demands of tennis participation (indeed, one of
12 the findings referred to finding additional sources of financial support).

13 The indication that parents themselves need support from a range of external sources to
14 be able to help their children participate and progress in tennis highlights the continuing
15 necessity of expanding parenting research to examine the broader social context (Holt,
16 Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009; Juntumaa, Keskivaara, & Punamaki, 2005) and the
17 influence that external sources have on parents and the support they can provide to their children
18 (Harwood & Knight, 2009b; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2008). Although we have
19 begun to examine how certain relationships, such as the parent-coach relationship and familial
20 relationships, can influence children's experiences in sport (e.g., Côté, 1999; Jowett & Timson-
21 Katchis, 2005), the results of this study point to the importance of examining the influence of
22 more relationships and the interaction between relationships (e.g., familial, coach, and other
23 parents) on parents and consequently on children's experiences in sport.

1 Given the importance of spouses working together, it may be important to further
2 consider the experiences of single parents to identify if they adopt any additional strategies to be
3 able to support their children. Previous research has indicated that children from single parent
4 families may be disadvantaged in sport (e.g., less likely to participate, more likely to discontinue
5 participation) due to parents' reduced time and income to commit to sport (cf. Kirk et al., 1997a;
6 1997b). However, a longitudinal examination in Finland actually concluded that children from
7 single parent families were more likely to remain active in sport compared to children with a
8 parent (particularly father) who was not involved in their sport (Yang, Telama, & Laakso, 1996).
9 Thus, further research examining how single parents are able to support their children in sport
10 and the additional help they require might be warranted.

11 Overall, the findings of the current study corroborate previous literature, which indicate
12 that "successful sport families" (in this study, tennis families) find ways to organize their lives to
13 provide the necessary tangible support to facilitate children's sport participation. However, the
14 current study also highlights the strategies (particularly utilizing their spouse, other parents, and
15 coaches) that parents develop to further enhance the emotional, informational and tangible
16 support they can provide to their children. To further enhance the support they can provide,
17 parents indicated a need for additional informational support from organizations and coaches.

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Appendix

Parent Interview Guide

Area	Question
Demographics	How long have you been involved in tennis as a parent?
	How many children do you have that play tennis?
	What age are your children?
	What standard are your children?
	Where do your children train? Have they always trained there? If not, where else have they trained?
	What kind of club is it? (e.g., an academy, national training centre etc).
	How frequently are your children competing?
	What are your goals and your child's goals for their tennis involvement?
Tennis History	Can you tell me a bit of your history as a tennis parent?
	When your child first started playing tennis what was their involvement like?
	How has the child's involvement in tennis and training changed over time? How has your role changed?
	How would you describe your experience of being a tennis parent?
	What was it like when you first "became a tennis parent?" How were your initial experiences?
	As your child progressed in tennis how did you feel? How did your experiences change?
	How about now? What does it feel like now to be a tennis parent?
	How about your child's tennis experience, what do you think their experience has been like?
Parents' provision of support to their children	What do you think is the role of parents in tennis?
	How have you been able to fulfill these roles?
	Has your role changed as your child has progressed? (how?)
	How have you been able to fulfil these changing roles?
	What have you done to help your child progress in sport?
	Who did you seek help from to be able to support your child's progress?
	What did you do initially to help your child when they first started in tennis? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What help or guidance did you seek at this time?
	What did you do to help your child when they first started tournaments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What help or guidance did you seek at this time?
Specific sources of help and guidance	Who has provided you with help as a tennis parent? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has this help been useful? If yes, in what way has it been useful? If no, can you think of a reason why it hasn't been helpful?
	Specify potential sources of help – USTA, Club, Coach, other parents etc <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What help have you received from them? • What has been your best help or guidance?
Additional help or guidance required	What help do you feel would have been beneficial or helpful which maybe you didn't receive? How would this have been helpful? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who would you have liked to receive this help from? • Can you think of a reason why you might not have received this support? • How would you have liked this support to be provided?
Parental support and optimal experiences	Overall, what would you say has been most important in allowing you to support your child in tennis?
	What help do you feel has most helped to enhance your child's experiences in sport?
	What help has most enhanced your experience as a tennis parent?
	What support do you feel would have helped you to further enhance your children's experiences?
Summary Questions	Overall, how can we best help parents in tennis?
	What advice would you have for organizing bodies and clubs to help parents?
	How can coaches best help parents of tennis-playing children?
	What advice would you have for other parents regarding how to support their child in tennis?
	Overall, what would you say has been most beneficial in allowing you to support your child in tennis?
	Is there anything else regarding your help or support that you feel I should have covered that I haven't? Anything else you would like to tell me?

