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1 Running Head: FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' EXPERIENCES

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8 Factors that Influence Parents' Experiences at Junior Tennis Tournaments and Suggestions for

9 Improvement

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to (a) explore the factors that influence parents' experiences of watching their children compete at junior tennis tournaments and (b) identify suggestions for enhancing their experiences. Interviews were conducted with 40 parents of junior players in Western Australia. Parents' experiences at tournaments appeared to be primarily influenced by four factors: Their child's performance and behavior, sportspersonship, parent-parent interactions, and the tournament context. Participants also provided three recommendations to enhance their experiences: Educate and support players, educate and support parents, and organizational changes. The identification of these factors, along with participants' suggested changes, has a number of implications for parent education initiatives that may enhance parenting in junior tennis in the future.

DRAFT

1 Factors that Influence Parents' Experiences at Junior Tennis Tournaments and Suggestions for
2 Improvement

3 Children who participate in sport are largely dependent upon the support and
4 encouragement of their parents (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Parents usually select the sports
5 programs in which their children will participate and schedule their work, family, and social lives
6 around transporting children to training and financing activities (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, &
7 Pennisi, 2006, 2008; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Thus, as Green and Chalip (1998) recognized,
8 although children are the consumers of youth sport experiences, parents are the purchasers of
9 these experiences. Further, parents' experiences in the youth sport environment may "influence
10 the extent of encouragement, support, and/or provision of opportunities for their children, and the
11 manner in which this support is provided" (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008, p. 506). As such, while the
12 need to understand children's experiences in sport cannot be discounted, it is also important to
13 examine the factors that influence *parents' experiences* in youth sport and identify means to
14 improve their experiences. The current study was designed to address these issues.

15 Several recent studies, that provide the foundation for the current study, have specifically
16 focused on parents' experiences of youth sport. For example, Wiersma and Fifer (2008) sought
17 to examine the enjoyable and challenging aspects of being a youth sport parent. Through focus
18 groups conducted with 55 parents, Wiersma and Fifer found direct benefits parents enjoyed were
19 their satisfaction with their child's experience (e.g., seeing their child enjoy their experience and
20 seeing their sport skills develop) and the opportunities for them and their child to interact with
21 others. Parents also reported indirect enjoyment from their children learning life skills such as
22 teamwork and competition, friendships and affiliation with peers, enhanced self-esteem and self-
23 confidence, and other outcomes such as an active lifestyle and lasting memories. That is, parents

1 enjoyed the fact that their children gained these skills. Challenges parents encountered related to
2 providing the necessary support to their children and the pressure their children encountered due
3 to their involvement in sport. This study therefore revealed that numerous factors influenced
4 enjoyment and challenges parents encountered in youth sport.

5 Extending Wiersma and Fifer's (2008) findings regarding the challenges of being a sport
6 parent, Harwood and colleagues (Harwood, Drew, & Knight, 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a;
7 2009b) conducted three studies to identify the stressors parents associated with their children's
8 involvement in tennis and soccer. Taken together, the findings of these three studies indicated
9 that parents encounter organizational, competitive, and developmental stressors. Organizational
10 stressors included financial and time demands, issues with the organization, tournament
11 structures, and their child's training. Competitive stressors were directly related to the
12 competition experience, including issues such as talking to their child after a loss or poor
13 performance, dealing with cheating, and witnessing poor behavior. Developmental stressors were
14 related to parents concerns regarding their child's future sporting and life development and
15 included issues such as making decisions regarding schooling and sports academies. Harwood
16 and Knight (2009b) also identified that parents whose children were in the specializing stage
17 (Côté, 1999), which is when children focus on one or two sports and increase their amount of
18 training and competition, encountered the most stressors. Recognizing they had focused on
19 negative aspects of youth sport parenting in their studies, Harwood et al. (2010) concluded
20 further research in this area is needed because, "only by understanding and appreciating the
21 'sport parent' might applied researchers and youth sport organizations assist in the process of
22 helping parents to enjoy and optimize their role as a key social agent in their child-athletes'
23 development" (p. 53).

1 One of the aims of the current study was to examine the factors that influence parents'
2 experiences at youth sport competitions (specifically tennis tournaments). At competitions,
3 particularly in individual sports like tennis, parents can directly observe and provide feedback to
4 their children. It is likely that the feedback, support, and involvement that parents provide to their
5 children at competitions is influenced by the experiences parents and their children are having
6 (cf. Dorsch, McDonough, & Smith, 2009; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Previous research has shown
7 social and contextual factors influence parents' behaviors at competitions. Holt and colleagues
8 (2008) identified that parents' comments varied in relation to contextual factors (i.e., score, time
9 of game, and importance of the match) and personal factors (i.e., parents' perceived expertise
10 and parents' empathy with child). Further, parents appeared to be more positively involved at
11 competitions in certain circumstances, but when things changed (e.g., the score or the perceived
12 importance of a match), their involvement and behaviors were more negative.

13 Similarly, Wiersma and Fifer (2008) found certain characteristics of youth sport and
14 situational triggers influenced parents' behaviors at competitions. Characteristics of youth sport
15 included factors such as the nature of specific sports, the quality of the officials, and the league
16 quality (e.g., the level and organization of the league). Situational triggers included aspects such
17 as perceived inequality (e.g., unequal distribution of playing time), self-regulated behaviors (e.g.,
18 seeing children struggle), and unintended competitive reactions (e.g., good intentions that boil
19 over). Together, Holt et al.'s (2008) and Wiersma and Fifer's studies show that a range of factors
20 influence parents' experiences and behaviors at competitions and point towards the importance
21 of understanding more about parents' experiences in the social context of competitions.
22 Furthermore, these studies show that it is important to move beyond the analysis of

1 stressors/challenges (see Harwood and Knight, 2009a; 2009b) and consider factors that may
2 influence parents' experiences in both positive and negative ways.

3 In addition to examining factors that influence parents' experiences, the current study
4 also sought to identify parents' views regarding factors that could be changed to improve their
5 experiences at competitions. Such information may provide a valuable contribution to sports
6 organizations to help enhance parents' experiences and better tailor parent
7 education/involvement initiatives because the suggestions will be from parents themselves,
8 which is the targeted audience of such initiatives. To date, only a few studies have asked parents
9 to provide suggestions to improve their own experiences or involvement. For example, in
10 Wiersma and Fifer's (2008) study, parents suggested that parents should role model appropriate
11 behaviors and keep sport and their involvement in perspective to reduce negative sporting
12 experiences for parents and children. Similarly, in a study by Dorsch et al., (2009) parents
13 discussed ideas such as managing their emotional reactions to competitions and learning
14 appropriate spectator behaviors. In learning these behaviors, it might be assumed that these
15 factors subsequently helped parents and their children to enjoy the youth sport experience.

16 Researchers have sought to identify children's perceptions of appropriate parental
17 behaviors (e.g., Knight, Boden, & Holt, 2010; Knight, Neely, & Holt, 2011) and made
18 recommendations for organizations, coaches, and parents regarding how to improve parental
19 involvement at competitions (e.g., Gould et al., 2006; 2008; Knight et al., 2010; 2011). For
20 example, numerous researchers have indicated that parents need to be educated regarding
21 positive and negative parenting practices (Gould et al., 2006; Knight et al., 2010; 2011) and
22 parenting styles (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009; Sapieja, Dunn, & Holt, 2011).
23 However, although such recommendations are important and help to provide guidance for the

1 generation of youth parent initiatives, these studies did not specifically set out to seek parents'
2 suggestions for improving their experiences at competitions. Gaining parents' views regarding
3 how to improve their experience (with the ultimate aim of increasing parents' support and
4 involvement) would appear to be an important step to advance this area.

5 In summary, it is important to develop further understanding of factors that influence
6 parents' experiences at tournaments. There is also a gap in the literature when it comes to
7 understanding parents' views of factors that could be changed to improve their experiences.
8 Another relevant issue is that the majority of research examining parenting in sport has been
9 conducted in the UK (e.g., Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b), the US (e.g., Gould et al., 2006;
10 2008) and Canada (e.g., Holt et al., 2008; Knight et al., 2010; 2011). The current study was
11 conducted in Australia, following Gould et al.'s (2008) suggestion that more research with
12 parents from different countries will help provide insights into which factors might be consistent
13 across cultures and which may be more specific to a certain place. As such, the purposes of this
14 study were to (a) examine factors that influence parents' experiences of watching their children
15 compete at junior tennis tournaments and (b) identify suggestions for enhancing their
16 experiences.

17 Method

18 Methodology and Philosophical Underpinnings

19 This study was exploratory and the purposes required an approach that would enable the
20 identification of factors that influence parents' experiences and suggestions to improve
21 experiences. Therefore, it was well suited to a qualitative description approach. Qualitative
22 description studies can be used to provide a comprehensive examination of events -- tournaments
23 in the current study (Sandelowski, 2000). Such studies generally use a combination of purposive

1 sampling, data collection through unstructured or semi-structured interviews, and a variant of
2 qualitative content analysis (Sandelowski, 2000; 2010). Additionally, qualitative description is
3 particularly appropriate when seeking to obtaining answers to questions that have implications
4 for practitioners and policy makers (Sandelowski, 2000).

5 Qualitative description is not underpinned by any specific philosophic foundations other
6 than being guided by the general tenets of naturalistic inquiry (Sandelowski, 2000). However, in
7 line with Miles and Huberman (1984) (who proposed the data analysis techniques employed in
8 the current study) this study was underpinned by realism (Bhaskar, 1978). Realism posits that
9 social phenomena do not only exist in the human mind, but also in the objective world and
10 relatively stable relationships can be found among them. Through exploration it is thus possible
11 to identify the patterns that underpin social life, located within social structures.

12 **Participants**

13 Participants were recruited from three tennis tournaments in Western Australia. The
14 tournaments were selected based on the standard of the competition (players must be competing
15 for Australian Ranking points), the timing of the tournament (during the summer months), and
16 the age groups at the tournament (12 and under to 16 and under, which corresponds with the
17 specializing stage of development; Côté, 1999). Tournament selection was based on these criteria
18 to increase the likelihood of accessing information rich participants.

19 Participants attending these tournaments were then purposefully sampled based on two
20 criteria: (a) Parent of at least one child competing in the tournament, and (b) had been attending
21 tournaments with their child for at least a year. In total, the sample was comprised of 40 parents
22 (20 mothers and 20 fathers) of 47 children (14 female and 33 male) competing in the
23 tournaments. The sample size was not set a priori. However, based on comparable studies (e.g.,

1 Harwood & Knight, 2009b), it was estimated that a sample of at least 20 parents would be
2 needed to reach an adequate level of saturation. The final sample was larger than our original
3 estimate for two reasons. First, there was a very high response rate (46 parents were approached,
4 40 agreed, for a response rate of 87%). Second, data were collected via fieldwork trips to
5 Australia (the researchers were based in Canada at the time of the study) and it was decided it
6 was better to interview all available participants rather than risk not having sufficient saturation
7 because it would have been difficult to return to Australia to collect additional data. Ultimately,
8 everyone who met the sampling criteria and agreed to be in the study were interviewed, which
9 may have led to over-sampling. However, over-sampling was considered less of a threat than
10 under-saturation. The mean age of the players was 13.07 years ($SD = 1.70$ years). On average,
11 the participants had been attending tournaments with their children for 4.5 years ($SD = 1.87$).

12 **Procedure**

13 Following the receipt of Institutional Research Ethics Board approval, personnel at
14 Tennis Australia, Tennis West, and tournament directors in Western Australia were contacted to
15 inquire about the possibility of conducting interviews with parents at tournaments. Tournament
16 directors were provided with an overview of the study, the information letter that would be
17 distributed to parents, and given an opportunity to raise any questions or concerns.

18 Participants were recruited directly at the tournaments. Potential participants were
19 approached at the beginning of the day while players were warming up (prior to the start of play)
20 and an interview was scheduled for later that day. In other cases potential participants were
21 approached to schedule an interview when it was clear their child was engaged in other activities.
22 To ensure ample opportunities to recruit participants, the first author attended each tournament
23 daily (approximately 10-12 hours each day, throughout the duration of the tournament).

1 **Data Collection**

2 Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews. Interviews were
3 conducted in a secluded area in the clubhouse at each tournament. Before the interview, each
4 participant was provided with a verbal and written explanation of the study. Participants were
5 informed their participation was voluntary, that all the information they shared would remain
6 anonymous, and they were provided with an opportunity to ask any questions about the study.
7 Participants then completed an informed consent form before beginning the interview. On
8 average the interviews lasted 40.05 minutes ($SD = 14.23$ minutes).

9 The interview guide (see Appendix A) was developed based on previous studies
10 examining parental involvement in youth sport (e.g., Gould et al., 2008; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008),
11 parental stressors (e.g., Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b), and parental support (Knight & Holt,
12 2011). The interview guide began with introductory questions, followed by main questions,
13 before concluding with summary questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Introductory questions
14 focused upon parents' and children's tennis history and reasons for involvement in tennis. These
15 questions were included to provide an opportunity for rapport to develop between the participant
16 and the researcher, to introduce the parent to the overall topic, and give them time to start
17 thinking about the area (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The main questions focused upon parents'
18 general experiences at *tournaments*, experiences of specific aspects of tournaments, and
19 suggestions for improvement. Summary questions asked participants to summarize their overall
20 views. Overall, the questions were 'neutral' and probes were used to inquire about positive and
21 negative issues to ensure a balanced approach.

22 **Data Analysis**

1 Initial data analysis, which was carried out by the first author as she conducted the
2 interviews, took place by reviewing the audio files of the interviews completed each day prior to
3 conducting interviews the next day (cf. Holt, Knight, & Tamminen, 2011). Through this process
4 initial ideas regarding factors influencing parents' experiences and suggestions to improve
5 experiences were identified. These initial ideas led to small changes to the interview guide
6 during the data collection period (e.g., the addition of a question regarding tournament referees).
7 Analysis of the audio files also allowed for clarification of meanings with participants on
8 subsequent days if any confusion arose when listening to the files.

9 Once data collection had been completed, a professional service transcribed the
10 interviews verbatim. The first author then read and re-read the transcripts to ensure immersion in
11 the data prior to beginning the formal process of analysis. Data analysis was conducted following
12 the stages outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), in which data are reduced, put into varying
13 data displays, and then conclusions are drawn and verified against the data.

14 The initial stage of data analysis was a process of data reduction, which sought to reduce
15 the amount of information in the transcripts and extract the meaningful information (or units of
16 data) from the transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This occurred by identifying the data
17 related to and answering the research question and then allocating codes to these data. Three
18 different types of codes were allocated to the data during the process of data reduction: (a)
19 Descriptive codes, which involve limited interpretation and simply describe the units of data; (b)
20 Interpretive codes, which involve some interpretation of the meaning of the data, taking the
21 coding beyond basic description; (c) Pattern codes, which were more explanatory and sought to
22 infer relationships between the descriptive and interpretive codes. For example, descriptive codes
23 such as parents coaching and players calling lines incorrectly were allocated to the data.

1 Interpretive codes, such as opponents cheating, were then developed by interpreting the meaning
2 of the descriptive codes and grouping them together. Relationships were then identified between
3 and across the interpretive codes and pattern codes such as sportspersonship were created.

4 Once data had been coded and reduced data displays were produced. Data displays are
5 visual representations of the data, which allow the data to be viewed systematically aiding the
6 identification of relationships between codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Two forms of data
7 displays were used. First, data networks, which link ideas or codes through a series of
8 interconnected lines, were created. Next, data matrices were produced to illustrate the codes each
9 participant had discussed. Data matrices are tables containing two lists that intersect across rows
10 and columns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data matrices can be obtained from the first author.

11 **Methodological Rigor**

12 Steps were taken during and following data collection to enhance the methodological
13 rigor of this study (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). During data collection, the
14 first author was immersed in the tournament environment, which increased her understanding of
15 the Western Australia tournament context. This helped to provide context to the interview data
16 and ensured the first author could understand the experiences participants described.

17 Additionally, through intensive engagement in the setting(s) the first author had opportunities to
18 engage in a number of informal conversations with parents to clarify any issues from their
19 interviews and discuss ideas with tournament directors, coaches, and sport psychologists who
20 were present at the tournaments, providing additional context and understanding of the
21 tournament experience.

22 Once the first author had finished the initial analysis the second author was given a full
23 list of the codes and a sample of quotes for all the codes. He reviewed the codes and the quotes

1 parents highlighted that their child performing to their potential, their on court behavior, and
2 their reaction to their match were factors that could influence their experience.

3 ***Performing to their potential.*** (Number of participants reporting this theme: 28). The
4 extent to which parents thought their child was performing to her/his potential was a factor that
5 influenced parents' experiences. There were positive and negative reactions to this factor. For
6 example, a mother said she enjoyed tournaments, "When [name of child] is playing her best. I
7 mean she's played some brilliant games that she's lost but like the coaching is kicking in. Her
8 feet are moving. She's hitting well. They're really enjoyable games. It's enjoyable tennis" (P34).
9 On the other hand, participants also indicated that watching their child's matches, particularly
10 when they perceived their child to be underperforming, could be difficult. A father described this
11 experience, stating, "I mean it's just... when you know the kid's not playing to their ability level
12 is, that's slightly, I get slightly tense" (P28). In fact, for some participants the potential of seeing
13 their child underperform appeared to prevent them from watching matches.

14 ***Child's on court behavior.*** (Number of participants: 26). The difficulties participants
15 encountered watching their children compete appeared to be exacerbated if their child displayed
16 a negative attitude or behavior on court. As a father said:

17 You know it's not very nice when you sit out there and kids are screaming and throwing
18 their racquets and you think "God!" That's probably the worst thing for a parent. My son
19 went through a little, thankfully a fairly short period, and I said to him, "If you do that
20 again I'm not, you can forget it because I'm not going to sit and watch that" (P31).

21 Some participants described being embarrassed by their child's behavior in these situations.
22 However, the majority of participants who discussed this issue shared feelings of disappointment
23 because their child's negative attitude could lead to them underperforming. In contrast, when

1 children reacted positively in difficult situations or maintained a positive attitude throughout the
2 game, parents had more positive experiences. As one participant explained:

3 As a parent it's nice I think to have your kids come off and you don't have to be
4 embarrassed. Other people aren't going to be looking at you and thinking 'oh my God' he
5 was the one who had the really bad behavior, Instead they are looking and thinking that
6 kid had a really good attitude today (P31).

7 ***Child's reaction to match.*** (Number of participants: 20). A number of participants
8 indicated their enjoyment or concerns regarding their child's performance or behavior arose
9 because of their child's reaction after the match. That is, when children reacted positively to
10 games, parents indicated that they had a more positive experience. As one parent said, "Oh
11 absolutely that's a positive, if the kids are happy and the kids want to continue I think the
12 parent's happy" (P28). Another shared similar sentiments, explaining, "I mean we keep coming
13 back 'cause the kids love the tournaments and they've never said they don't feel like it. If that
14 started to happen, if they were upset when they lost then we'd stop" (P38). However, parents
15 also indicated that watching their children underperform could be difficult because they knew
16 their child would be disappointed after the match. For example, a mother explained her feelings
17 when watching her son, "You want them to achieve something and I suppose also... every time
18 they come and they're upset because they've lost or played badly you feel sad for them" (P14).

19 ***Sportspersonship.*** Participants indicated their experiences at tournaments could be
20 positively or negatively affected by opponents' and parents' sportspersonship.

21 ***Opponent's attitude and behavior.*** (Number of participants: 32). The most commonly
22 recounted problem participants described was opponents cheating on line calls during matches
23 (at junior tournaments there is usually not an umpire on each court). When participants witnessed

1 children cheating during matches it could cause them to feel frustrated and annoyed. For
2 example, one mother described her feelings:

3 It's [cheating] very frustrating, very frustrating. And the kids can't do anything about it
4 and nor can us... You know, and that's half the time why I kind of can't watch the match
5 because I just find it too frustrating, some of the line calls (P27).

6 The frustration participants described appeared to emerge because they thought opponents
7 cheating upset their child and effected their game. As one parent simply stated, "If he thinks the
8 other guy is cheating it upsets him...and now I get annoyed" (P1).

9 Some participants also indicated how their experience of watching their child compete
10 was influenced by the general attitude displayed by their child's opponent. For example, a
11 number of participants shared stories indicating how enjoyable matches were when they
12 perceived their child's opponent was respectful and positive to their child. As one of the
13 participants explained, "The main thing is they enjoy it and they enjoy it if their opponents have
14 a good attitude and there is a social aspect to it. It's great if they win, but that's not the be all and
15 end all" (P9).

16 Unfortunately, just as a positive attitude could have a positive influence on parents
17 experiences, perceived negative, disrespectful, or intimidating attitudes from opponents was
18 associated with negative experiences. As one parent said:

19 It's [the tournament experience] not good because it's the couple of kids that, that really
20 intimidate the other kids it makes it quite uncomfortable for the parents to watch. You
21 don't know really how to say anything cause that actually makes your kid embarrassed
22 and you know there have been a couple of players here that've been banned from, from

1 actually coming to tournaments here in [name of city] and ...it's not good for our kid to
2 be going through that (P20).

3 ***Parental involvement in matches.*** (Number of participants: 30). Participants also recalled
4 issues arising from parents cheating at tournaments. Specifically, participants described problems
5 occurring because parents became involved in matches or coached their children. Participants
6 perceived that such involvement could negatively influence their children's performance and
7 enjoyment, which consequently influenced participants' experiences. A mother described her
8 experiences of other parents:

9 The parents are sometimes despicable with what they do. You know? They all know you
10 can't coach off the field, but they all do it to the degree that they'll do it in another
11 language so that you don't know what they're saying, but you do know what they're
12 doing...it's annoying" (P29).

13 Similar to their feelings about opponents cheating, participants indicated that parents cheating
14 could frustrate and annoy them. One mother said, "Sometimes I almost burst into tears,
15 especially when they play somebody you know and you know the parents are like that [get
16 involved in matches], it's very frustrating" (P35).

17 ***Parent-parent interactions.*** Participants indicated that their direct interactions (or lack
18 of interactions) with other parents at tournaments also influenced their experiences. The nature of
19 the interactions participants had with other parents ranged from positive to negative interactions.

20 ***Social opportunities.*** (Number of participants: 36). For a number of participants,
21 tournaments provided an opportunity to socialize with other parents. When such social
22 opportunities existed, it was associated with positive experiences. As one mother explained:

1 Most of the parents you know have got this little group and we all sort of see, seeing as
2 we all sort of see each other at tournaments it's like we'll hang out for a little while,
3 coffees and stuff, so yeah I think without his tournaments we wouldn't have much of a
4 friends network (P17).

5 Expanding on this, another mother said:

6 Generally, I actually love them [tournaments]. [Name of child] enjoys them. I find it's a
7 bonding experience. I think it's a good community. You do become a part of the tennis
8 world. You start to know parents and families who become lifelong friends...I enjoy it. I
9 enjoy that whole atmosphere of it. I enjoy myself. I enjoy talking to parents and having
10 coffees... I reckon it's great. I love it (P23).

11 Reinforcing the importance of such social opportunities participants also described how a lack of
12 social interaction with other parents could detract from the tournament experience. As one
13 mother said:

14 My experience is sitting around bored with not many people talking to me. And if they
15 do, like if they do talk to you and then your son is beating them, then they're not very
16 happy about [your son] beating their son or whatever. So yeah it's not very sociable for
17 parents at the tournaments I don't think...so yeah quite boring I think would be the
18 overall thing for me (P36).

19 In fact, some parents indicated that parent cliques could develop, leading to feelings of
20 exclusion. A mother recalled:

21 The parents sort of stick in their little groups. I don't really like that, I mean we're all here
22 to see our children get somewhere but they all know that the ones where the kids are
23 really good they're [the parents] just 'better' type thing. I don't like that sort of 'in

1 groups' [parents of the better players], the 'out groups' [parents of younger, less
2 successful, or visiting players], and on the 'outer' or the 'inner' [group], but then at the
3 end of the day it's not me out on court. I can't show to my daughter that that bothers me
4 about a tournament otherwise that's going to affect her and affect her game too (P21).

5 ***Parent disputes.*** (Number of participants: 18). Despite the potential benefits of parents
6 having social opportunities (i.e., the previous subtheme) some participants also described some
7 difficulties they had encountered with parents when disputes arose. They recalled situations in
8 which they had altercations with parents regarding their behavior at tournaments. One mother
9 shared an experience she had when she witnessed a father disciplining his son for losing, "I went
10 and spoke to the club and then the father came and he was in my face abusing the crap out of me
11 in front of everyone" (P37). Participants indicated that such situations could be distressing and in
12 some instances prevented them from travelling to tournaments with their child.

13 ***The tournament context.*** Aside from their interactions with other people at tournaments,
14 participants also described elements of the tournament context that could influence their
15 experience of watching their children. Specifically, participants indicated the organization of the
16 tournament and the focus on ranking points could influence their tournament experiences
17 indirectly because they effected the aforementioned factors.

18 ***Tournament organization.*** (Number of participants: 21). Participants preferred
19 tournaments that were well organized and ran on time. As one mother simply said, "Everything's
20 always very well organized and I've very happy" (P24). Similarly, one mother explained how
21 she chose the tournaments in which to enter her child:

1 You get a general vibe from sort of everyone that's about. After a couple of days you
2 know, "Oh this is a really good tournament." They've scheduled it really well with the
3 times, so we're not sitting around waiting for four hours and things like that (P34).

4 In contrast, tournaments that did not run on time or were perceived to be scheduled badly
5 were associated with more negative tournament experiences because participants described long
6 days leading to them being tired. As one mother said, "Sometimes it's a bit tiring just sitting
7 around, you know, watching. Like today we've been here since 8 o'clock this morning and I
8 think the last game's at 3.30 so that side of it is perhaps a negative" (P10). Participants explained
9 that such long days could potentially exacerbate the negative feelings associated with the
10 aforementioned factors. For example, one mother explained how the long days could lead to her
11 reacting badly to her son after matches. She said:

12 Usually by 5pm of the tournament I'm so tired from getting up early and getting
13 everything and everybody organized and I always say I have to sit and watch these bad
14 manners. It really upsets me (P35).

15 ***Focus on ranking points.*** (Number of participants: 22). In a similar manner, participants
16 indicated the emphasis on ranking points that is inherent in tournaments influenced their
17 experience of watching their child compete because they perceived it led to children (and
18 parents) feeling under pressure to win. This, in turn, could lead to poor sportspersonship and
19 reduced interactions between parents. For example, one father said:

20 The problem is... the better players, they only like to play in tournaments where they can
21 obtain points so they get a national ranking. I reckon that's a good system on the one
22 hand but a bad system on the other because the parents get too jumpy, parents get too
23 jumpy and it's all about the points (P32).

1 Another parent when explaining why she thought children cheated, said:

2 I think the major problem is the points system myself, because that's primarily what the
3 majority of these kids are out there for, the points... I think the pressure of getting ranked
4 and if you're not ranked... there's so much pressure to get points... so a lot of those kids
5 you sort of tend to think you know they're doing it [cheating] for a reason (P17).

6 **Suggestions for Improving Parents' Experiences at Tournaments**

7 Participants were asked to provide suggestions to enhance their experience at
8 tournaments. Three suggestions were provided, which related to the players, their own education
9 and support, and organizational changes. Unlike the previous category (which depicted parents'
10 positive and negative reactions to the identified factors), these suggestions all related to ways to
11 foster more positive experiences at tournaments.

12 **Provide education and support for players.** As outlined previously, participants'
13 experiences at tournaments were influenced by their own children's behavior and the behavior
14 and attitude of their child's opponent. As such, participants perceived that improving player's
15 attitudes and behaviors by educating them regarding sportspersonship and teaching them coping
16 skills would make matches easier to watch, therefore enhancing parents' experiences.

17 **Teach players coping skills.** (Number of participants: 27). Participants perceived that
18 teaching children to be 'mentally tough' or helping them develop coping skills would reduce the
19 anger or frustration they displayed on court, reducing the influence it has upon their performance
20 and consequently parents' experiences. As one father explained when discussing the difficulties
21 of watching his son lose his temper and throw his racquet on court, "You would think they would
22 learn that it doesn't help them. It gets them stressed and you're just giving points to the other

1 opponent but they don't...they need to be taught what to do" (P31). Coaches were perceived to
2 play an important role in helping children develop their coping skills. As one father said:

3 You know that mental toughness or the ability to you know cope, I mean that's the
4 difference between a good tennis player and a wonderful tennis player. Sometimes it's
5 how strong they are mentally and I think it would be good if they had some sort of coach
6 support there just to talk things over (P4).

7 Other participants suggested their children would benefit from having specific
8 psychological guidance to help them develop the skills to cope with poor performances. For
9 example, discussing the difficulties her son had dealing with losing, one mother suggested:

10 There are very few kids that do have that mental mindset themselves that they can cope
11 and there's a lot of others that can't....if you've got a mentor that deals, or ...a sports
12 psychologist that deals with that on a regular basis ...Then obviously their input would be
13 greatly received by a lot of children and parents, just to make life a bit easier (P34).

14 ***Educate players regarding sportpersonship.*** (Number of participants: 23). In a similar
15 manner, participants perceived that educating children about sportpersonship would hopefully
16 reduce poor behavior from players, making matches more enjoyable for parents. For example,
17 one mother explained:

18 I was actually only thinking about this the other day because I just thought there's a lot of
19 it [cheating] happening. We're seeing it more and more....they can maybe call the kids
20 together and have a talk to them after the games every day or have a bit of more
21 notifications you know (P40).

1 Another father said, "I think it's teaching kids how, you know, to behave on court and perhaps
2 how to behave in matches" (P18). Thus, parents recommended that player education from
3 coaches, tournament organizers, and the local tennis organization was needed.

4 **Provide education and support for parents.** A consistently discussed recommendation
5 to reduce inappropriate parental involvement in matches and the negative feelings participants'
6 experienced was to educate parents regarding the tournament process and appropriate behaviors
7 and provide support for parents.

8 ***Parent education regarding tournament involvement.*** (Number of Participants: 32).
9 Participants indicated that parents' experiences would be enhanced if they knew what to expect
10 at tournaments and if parents knew how to react and respond at tournaments. As such,
11 participants advocated for a range of parent education. For example, one mother described the
12 need for information about tournaments:

13 Maybe what they could have done was the first time your kid enters a tournament, maybe
14 they could send you out a package saying you've entered the tennis world, and this is
15 how it works, this is what your kid will go through, and this is what you will go through,
16 here's some hints of how to deal with it (P29).

17 Other participants indicated they would benefit from guidance regarding post-match interactions.
18 As one father, who had discussed the difficulties his daughter had coping with his and his wife's
19 involvement, said, "If you had an independent party that is mentoring you about coaching your
20 child and what you should do...then you will know how to best be involved" (P5).

21 ***Psychological support to help parents cope at tournaments.*** (Number of Participants:
22 21). Participants also indicated that having help to develop their own coping strategies might
23 help to make the tournament experience easier for them. A mother summarized:

1 I have talked about it with some parents, because sometimes we see a parent, see them
2 lose the plot and you think to yourself, "Is there someone, a sport psychologist, that
3 maybe they could talk to, we could talk to as parents?" Or someone outside of the family
4 realm and the coaches realm, you know what I mean? Someone not connected" (P23).

5 Another parent shared similar sentiments, explaining:

6 I need to talk to somebody [about] how to stay positive because for parents it's hard to
7 do. Because as I say, you get so frustrated, you do so much before you even come here
8 and then if you've watched a bad match it's sometimes hard to stay positive (P35).

9 ***Provide social opportunities for parents.*** (Number of participants: 27). Given the
10 positive influence socializing at tournaments could have on parents' experiences, parents
11 perceived that having more social opportunities at tournaments might be beneficial. As a way of
12 introducing parents to each other participants recommended providing activities for parents at
13 tournaments that would encourage them to interact. For example, one parent recommended:

14 Have a little social aspect, set up some sort of games or ping pong table or get parents
15 doing something or a pool table and have a little pool competition to take the parents
16 away from the court and have social aspects as well to relax them (P38).

17 Another parent suggested, "You know, sort of like bring in your racquet, I give you a racquet,
18 and just hit the ball. I am sure that lots of parents would come" (P13).

19 The additional benefit participants associated with having such activities available for
20 parents was they could interact when their children were playing, potentially reducing some
21 boredom, tension, or anxiety. As one mother explained:

22 I've always tried to think of things that parents can do while we're just sitting around
23 doing nothing, you know and we could get some groups together where we could do

1 something, you know... I think you know the amount of hours that I sit around playing
2 Tetris or Angry Birds [games on the Iphone], 'cause I've got nothing else to do...I
3 wonder how many kilos I've gained just by sitting there and doing nothing watching
4 tennis, because there's nothing else to do (P17).

5 Parents also suggested that putting on a social event, such as a barbeque or a dinner, may
6 help parents to become friends, leading to better interactions at tournaments. As a mother
7 explained:

8 Maybe hold some functions, maybe, from time to time..., maybe [a] function after this
9 tournament for example...or maybe events in between the tournament, or before the
10 tournament, or after the tournament...make parents feel part of the community (P6).

11 **Organizational changes.** (Number of participants: 29). In an attempt to reduce poor
12 sportspersonship and increase the positive attitudes and behaviors of players, parents indicated
13 that some organizational changes might be required. Specifically, participants indicated that
14 changes were needed with regards to how cheating is dealt with.

15 ***Organizational enforcement of rules.*** (Number of participants: 23). A number of
16 participants perceived that the rules regarding poor sportspersonship were not strictly enforced,
17 which meant that players "got away with" behavior that should not be acceptable. Thus, one
18 participant suggested:

19 If the court supervisors really were to come down on them [children] and say look this is
20 just not acceptable, straight off the bat... take a point, take a game off them [children],
21 take something that they [children] really will feel, you know that they'll [children] really
22 think "Oh that's not worth it" I think it will be very, I'm sure improvements would be
23 seen very, very quickly (P31).

1 In fact, a number of parents advocated for a 'zero tolerance' policy regarding such behaviors. A
2 mother provided the following suggestion, "I think Tennis West have got to tell all the
3 organizers, 'Right we're going to wipe this bad behaviour out'... they say "...If anyone swears
4 they're off, if a parent swears the game will be called off.'" She later continued, "...if they did
5 stop them [children] all doing it [cheating] and it just was not seen, then that would set the
6 standard and no one would slip" (P29).

7 *More umpires.* (Number of participants: 23). To ensure people displaying poor behaviors
8 could be reprimanded, participants indicated a needed for more umpires at tournaments. At most
9 junior tournaments there were only one or two roaming umpires that were responsible for
10 overseeing all the courts (in some instances up to 16 courts). Thus, as one parent explained:

11 As far as sort of the umpiring and line calls and that, I don't think it's totally fair. I don't
12 think it's sort of policed as much as it could be. But again, unfortunately, we don't have
13 the personnel here in WA [Western Australia] to actually cover these tournaments for the
14 young kids (P35).

15 As such, participants advocated for more umpires. One parent said, "Well if this was an ideal
16 world and there could be an umpire on every court, that would be, that would be great, cause
17 then you know that nothing could happen" (P19). Another father explained:

18 I also think that a lot of tournaments, there should be some more umpires and umpires
19 that can overrule or give a ruling because these guys won't overturn a point, even when
20 you're getting to, it's only when you're getting to the sort of national level that they've
21 actually got an umpire who will be calling the score and I know that that's difficult (to
22 have more umpires) but you know (P4).

23 **Discussion**

1 The purposes of this study were to (a) explore the factors influencing parents'
2 experiences of watching their children compete at tournaments and (b) identify suggestions for
3 enhancing their experiences. Personal, contextual, and policy-level factors influenced their
4 experiences. To a large extent parents' experiences were based on their children's behaviors
5 during and after games. Interestingly, it appeared that the same child could behave in different
6 ways to the same factor (e.g., on court behavior), which influenced whether a parent's experience
7 was positive or negative. This highlighted the complexity of understanding parenting in youth
8 sport. However, the parents were able to provide a number of suggestions to help make their
9 experiences at tournaments more positive. As such the findings offer empirical and applied
10 contributions to the literature.

11 The range of contextual and policy factors that influence, or have the potential to
12 influence parents' experiences, reinforces the importance of considering the broader social-
13 context of youth sport when examining parents' involvement (cf. Holt et al., 2008). Further,
14 although the current study focused on factors that influenced parents' experience at tournaments,
15 they were largely consistent with the three categories of parental stressors (organizational,
16 competitive, and developmental) that have been identified in previous research (Harwood et al.,
17 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b). It seemed that children's behavior could be
18 inconsistent and as a consequence parents could have positive and negative reactions to the same
19 factor. These findings perhaps relate to the age of the parents' children and the fact they were in
20 the specializing stage of sport development. The specializing stage can be a particularly difficult
21 time for parents because they are increasingly required to commit time, money, and emotional
22 support to their children but coaches are also becoming more important in children's lives, which

1 can lead to conflict or difficulty (Côté, 1999). As such, the current findings highlight the need to
2 place parents' experiences within broader context.

3 The most immediate factors that appeared to influence participants' experiences were
4 their own child's performance and behavior and the influence of poor sportspersonship upon
5 their child. Parents have previously indicated that their experiences are influenced directly
6 through the benefits they receive and also indirectly through their children's experiences
7 (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Further, research has highlighted that their child's performance and
8 behavior and the behavior of their opponents can influence the stress they associate with
9 watching their child compete (Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b). As such, the findings of the
10 current study reiterate the importance of striving to understand the reciprocal influence parents
11 and children have on each other (Dorsch et al., 2009) and the need to examine not only parent-to-
12 child but also child-to-parent influences to fully understand and improve parental involvement in
13 youth sport.

14 Researchers have also indicated that parents might unintentionally display inappropriate
15 behaviors at competitions due to the emotions evoked when their children compete (e.g., Gould
16 et al., 2008; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). The current study supports these findings and provides
17 additional understandings of why participants may experience such emotions. That is, when
18 participants witnessed their child underperforming, particularly if it was due to poor
19 sportspersonship, they experienced negative emotions on their child's behalf. Parents' negative
20 emotions, generally, appeared to arise because they thought their child would be upset or
21 disappointed. This finding provides some support for Holt et al's. (2008) finding that the
22 behaviors parents' display at competitions may be influenced by the empathy parents perceive
23 they have with their child.

1 If parents' emotions and possibly their reactions at competitions arise due to parental
2 empathy, focusing parent education initiatives on parents' emotions (or abilities to cope with
3 their emotions), rather than their behaviors may be beneficial. Parent education often focuses
4 upon suggesting or teaching parents about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. However, as
5 Wiersma and Fifer (2008) acknowledged, parents may have good intentions but be unable to
6 follow through with these because of unintended emotional reactions. Thus, parent education
7 initiatives focused upon helping parents to better understand their and their child's experiences
8 and, as advocated by the participants in this study, providing parents with strategies to cope with
9 the emotions they experience may be more effective for enhancing parents' experiences than
10 only highlighting appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (Gould et al., 2008; Harwood &
11 Knight, 2009a; 2009b). Further, as addressed in two of the recommendations provided by
12 participants in the current study (i.e., helping children to develop coping strategies and reducing
13 poor sportspersonship), reducing the 'triggers' for parents' emotional reactions at competitions
14 may also be an effective way to reduce parents' emotional experience at tournaments.

15 Previous research examining parental behaviors at youth sport competitions has indicated
16 that tension between parents may influence parents' reactions during games, highlighting the
17 importance of contextual- and policy-level changes at youth sport competitions to reduce the
18 potential for negative parental behaviors and interactions (e.g., Holt et al., 2008; Omli & LaVoi,
19 2009). Policy suggestions to enhance parents' involvements at competitions have included:
20 Separating parents, preventing parents from commenting during games, and banning parents
21 entirely (c.f. Holt et al., 2008; Kidman et al., 1999; Streat, 1995). However, the experiences and
22 recommendations of the participants in the current study provide an alternative approach, which
23 is actually to increase the amount of interaction between parents. It appeared that by increasing

1 the social aspect of tournaments and reducing feelings of exclusion, parents would feel more
2 comfortable at tournaments, reducing one more of the emotional stressors parents encountered.

3 It is recognized that parents' make considerable sacrifices to support their children in
4 sport, particularly with regards to their own social life (e.g., Kirk et al., 1997; Wolfenden & Holt,
5 2005). Given humans innate need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985) it is understandable that
6 parents would seek to develop relationships with parents at tournaments and may have negative
7 experiences if they are unable to develop relationships with other parents. A lack of relatedness,
8 such as the feelings of exclusion recalled by participants in this study, may reduce parents'
9 motivation to attend tournaments or hinder their ability to fully support their children's
10 involvement (cf. Knight & Holt, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, as advocated by the
11 participants in this study, increasing parents' sense of relatedness through social activities is
12 another alternative avenue through which to enhance parents' experiences at tournaments.

13 Understanding the constraints and influences within the overall tournament context
14 provides further insight to enhance parent education initiatives. For example, parents
15 emphasizing match outcomes and focusing upon winning is consistently identified as one factor
16 that can negatively influence children's sporting experiences and development (e.g., Gould et al.,
17 2008; Lauer et al., 2010a). As such, researchers have often highlighted the importance of parents
18 focusing upon their child's performance (creating a task-oriented rather than ego-oriented
19 climate; Harwood, Spray, & Keegan, 2008) and advocated for parent education regarding this
20 factor (e.g., Knight et al., 2010). However, children are competing within a result-oriented
21 environment and the outcomes of their performance might lead to an array of benefits for
22 children and possibly their parents. Given the outcome-focus of tournaments, it seems
23 understandable that parents might focus on their child's performance. Acknowledging the

1 influence of contextual factors on parents' involvement is important to fully appreciate parents'
2 experience and identify any areas where changes may be possible. For example, could changes in
3 the social-context of tournaments, such as a recognition of individual improvement or team-
4 based competitions, be incorporated within youth sport to reduce the sole focus on individual
5 outcomes and reduce the influence rankings can have on parents' experiences?

6 The suggestions provided by the parents in this study highlight a number of ways to
7 address the factors influencing parents' experiences (see Figure 2). Based on these suggestions
8 there are a number of avenues for sport psychology consultants to explore or consider. First and
9 foremost, this study illustrates the potential usefulness of sport psychology consultants working
10 directly with parents, particularly focused upon helping parents understand and recognize the
11 factors that influence their experience at tournaments and develop effective coping strategies to
12 deal with specific issues. Importantly, it appears that parents not only need to develop strategies
13 to cope with watching their children compete, but also the overall tournament experience. For
14 example, helping parents to develop strategies to cope with possible negative interactions with
15 other parents and the extensive time demands associated with tournaments could all be
16 beneficial. One strategy that might be particularly useful is working with parents to focus on the
17 process of tournaments (rather than the outcome). Thus, parents could be encouraged to attend to
18 the elements of tournaments they enjoy and curb their reactions to factors that have negative
19 influences. Another important aspect is working with parents to try and separate their children's
20 experience from their own. This is likely to be difficult but could be achieved by explaining the
21 need for parents to be consistent in their style of parenting because an inconsistent style and
22 behaviors may cause confusion and distress for children (cf. Holt et al., 2009). Finally, sport

1 psychology consultants could work directly with tournaments organizers to create positive
2 experiences for parents through educational sessions and social events.

3 The factors influencing parents' experiences and the recommendations arising from this
4 study must be considered within the limitations of the study. Specifically, data was collected
5 from a relatively remote area in Western Australia. Thus, the extent to which these findings are
6 representative of the experiences of parents in other areas of Australia or other countries is
7 unknown. There is potential for sampling bias to be present within this study. That is, the current
8 study might be limited to parents that perceived themselves to be more appropriately involved at
9 tournaments because parents that have more negative experiences or more negative involvement
10 may be less inclined to volunteer for such a study. Methodologically, we may have over-sampled
11 participants which led to extensive data reduction in the presentation of the results. Although we
12 used a member-checking protocol, only 10 participants replied. Their responses were positive,
13 but responses of other parents remain unknown and therefore the member-checking protocol was
14 incomplete. Finally, this study did not examine the consequences of parents' involvement for
15 children. Future research examining the link between parents' experiences and parents'
16 behaviors is needed. Particularly, we think there is particular potential to further exploring the
17 need for and potential benefits that might arise from providing social opportunities for parents at
18 competitions.

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Factors influencing parents experiences	Child's performance and behavior	Performing to their potential
		Child's on court behavior
		Child's reaction to the match
	Sportspersonship	Opponent's attitude and behaviors
		Parental involvement in matches
	Parent-parent interactions	Social opportunities
		Parent disputes
	Tournament context	Tournament organization
		Focus on ranking points
	Suggestions for improving parents' experiences	Provide education and support for players
Educate players regarding sportspersonship		
Provide Education and support for parents		Parent education regarding tournament involvement
		Psychological support to help parents cope at tournaments
		Provide social opportunities for parents
Organizational changes		Organizational enforcement of rules
		More umpires

Figure 1. Factors influencing parents' experiences at tournaments and suggestions for improvement

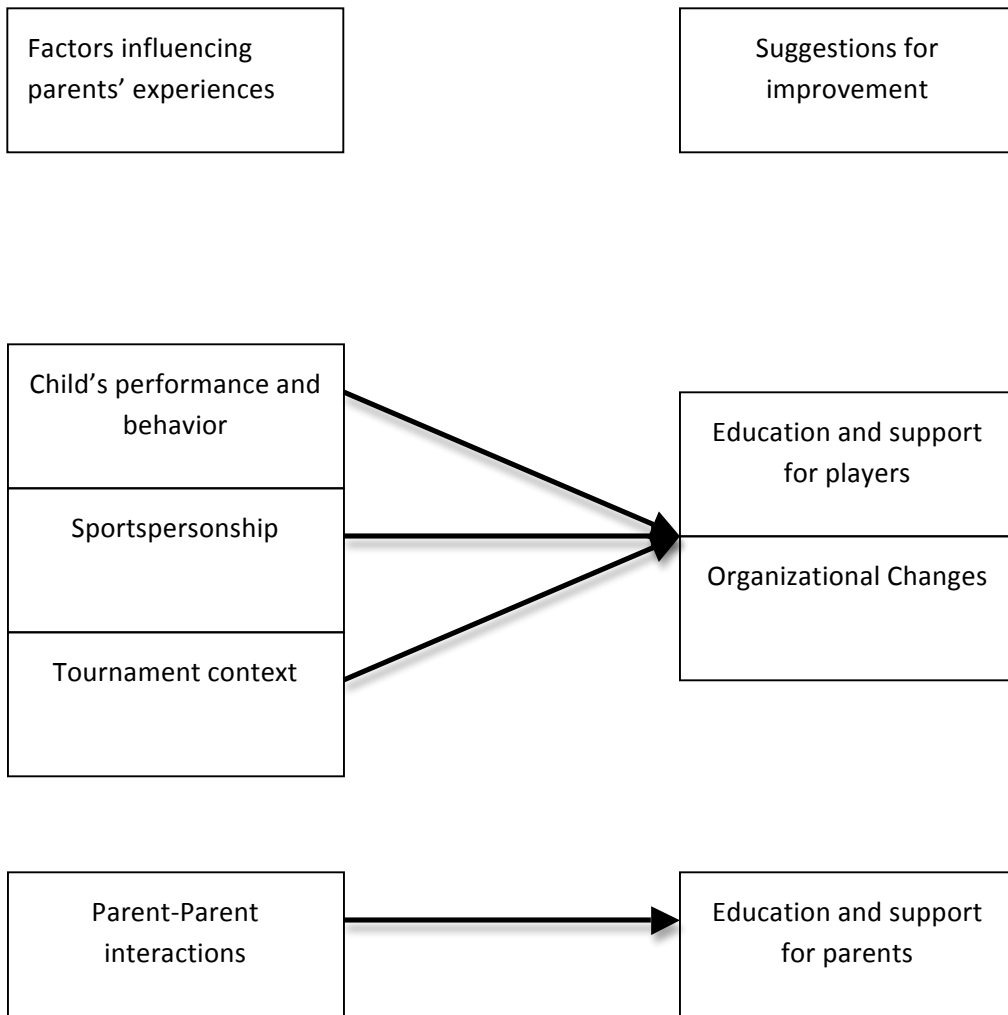


Figure 2: Link between factors influencing experiences and suggestions for improvement

Appendix A: Interview guide

Area of question	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?
	How frequently are your children competing? Do you travel with them to competitions?
Tennis History	Can you tell me a bit of your history as a tennis parent? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When did your child start playing? • How did you become involved? • How has your involvement changed? • How has your child's involvement changed? • How have your requirements and roles changed?
	What would you like your child to get out of tennis?
General experience as a tennis parent	How would you describe your experience of being a tennis parent? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall experience – positive, negative, any defining parts? • What was it like when you first became a tennis parent? • As your child progressed how did you feel? • How about now? What have your most recent experiences been like? • Can you think of any reason why your experiences may have changed? • How do you think your child's tennis experience has been?
Experiences at tournaments	How would you describe your general experiences of tennis tournaments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors have made it positive or negative? • How have these experiences and the factors influencing it changed over time? • Provide regarding factors that have a positive or a negative influence
	What is it like as a parent watching your child compete at tournaments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors influence this experience?
	What is your experience of other children at tournaments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe for positive and negative factors related to other children?
	What is your experience of other parents at tennis tournaments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe for positive and negative factors related to other parents?
	What is your experience of coaches at tennis tournaments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe for positive and negative factors related to coaches?
	What is your experience of referees at tennis tournaments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe for positive and negative factors related to referees?
	Is there anything you think would improve your experience at tournaments? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe how these factors might improve the experience • What is about these factors that you think is important?
	Summary Questions
What factors do you think have the largest effect on your experience as a tennis parent?	
How would you summarize your experiences of watching your child at tennis tournaments?	
What factors do you think have the largest effect on your experience at tournaments?	
What advice would you have for organizing bodies and clubs to improve parents' experiences?	
What advice would you have for coaches to improve parents' experiences?	
Overall, what recommendations do you have for improving parents' experiences in junior tennis?	
Overall, what recommendations do you have for improving parents' experiences at tennis tournaments?	