



# Quality Tennis Coaching for the Future...Now!

**Miguel Crespo, Ph.D.**

*ITF Development research Officer*

## INTRODUCTION

The tennis coaches' main job is coaching players to play tennis. As the number of tennis players increases worldwide —research has shown that there are around 60 million tennis players in the world— the demand for tennis coaches who provide quality coaching also increases.

The coach has a crucial role in the tennis experience of the player no matter which is the level of play. The quality of the tennis experience for the player is directly proportional to the quality of coaching, and the quality of the coaching is positively related to the quality of coaches' education.

In this presentation we will distinguish between:

- Quality coaching (the outcome).
- Quality coaches education (the mean).

However, what is quality?

Quality can be defined as an essential and distinguishing attribute of something or someone, a degree or grade of excellence or worth. There are several approaches that can help us to understand what quality means:

- You know quality when you see it.
- Quality is a function of brand.
- Quality is a passing grade.
- Quality is perfection.
- Quality is the absence of problems.
- Quality is a zero defect code.
- Quality is acceptable performance.
- Quality is meeting goals.
- Quality is meeting requirements.

Quality coaches need to meet the stable requirements, which can be set by using specific indicators of quality in order to, measure quality, and measure it over time.

These requirements or indicators can describe the roles, jobs, competencies, skills, and knowledge of tennis coaches and are logically derived from the purpose or function of the coach and from the design roles: coaching beginner players, coaching a Fed Cup team, etc.



Individual quality requirements can take different forms:

- Attributes or competences – the coach is able to...
- Does the coach meet the specified measurements?
- Functionality – does the coach do what they are supposed to?

The requirements or standards specify minimum competencies expected of coaches in several domains:

- Knowledge of the game.
- Playing skills of a certain level.
- Injury prevention, care and management.
- Risk management.
- Human growth, development and learning.
- Training, conditioning and nutrition.
- Social and psychological aspects of coaching.
- Technique, tactics and strategies.
- Management and administration.
- Professional preparation and development, e.g., public relations.

Coaching will have quality if its totality of characteristics is applied to satisfy the needs of the players.

Quality coaching can be summarised as making the game of tennis work for the players, the coaches, the fans, and for all people involved. Therefore, quality professionals need to understand the game and optimise the whole system of coaching tennis.

## **QUALITY COACHING AT WORK**

High quality coaching benefits tennis and those who take part by:

- Increasing participation at all levels.
- Encouraging participants to stay physically active over a longer period of time.
- Helping participants to develop both as individuals and as members of a team.
- Improving people's understanding of the health-related benefits of tennis and physical activity.
- Fostering a safer environment for participants through child protection, risk management and the elimination of harassment.
- Achieving higher sporting standards at all levels, both nationally and internationally, creating a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

## **Components of a Quality Coaching Process**

McKinney (1988) provides a possible answer in the following acronym: FACES (fairness, application, challenge, entertainment and service).

Component	Definition	Strategies
FAIRNESS	Fairness is concern, consistency, being responsible, organised, knowledgeable, and using a framework rather than arbitrary power. Fairness increases trust and credibility with students.	Use of a contract syllabus, clear and consistent grading, a reasonable yet challenging workload, treating students as adults, meeting our responsibilities, and providing some choices for students in the class structure and requirements.
APPLICATION	Refers to helping students learn to use what we teach them (theories, knowledge, skills, and thinking) in their personal and professional lives.	Use of group projects, discussion, exam questions, which emphasise application, projects, problem solving exercises, field placements, internships, original examples, and thought-problems.
CHALLENGE	Demanding students without losing control over them.	Teaching controversially, playing the devil's advocate to encourage thinking, critiquing drafts of assignments before they are turned in for grading, providing detailed written and verbal feedback on exams and assignments, giving detailed examples of what is expected and wanted from students, and even grading on a curve if the aim has been set too high for most students who have put forth real effort.
ENTERTAINMENT	Enthusiasm, insight, understanding, and occasionally good humour.	Using film, video, guest speakers, debates, simulation games, phone interviews, and field trips. Even our own style can be of some help: use of gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, vocabulary, and sense of humour.
SERVICE	Being concerned about their discipline and bringing the best of their discipline to bear on issues of content, advising, and curricula.	Giving guest lectures to wider audiences, conducting and participating in workshops for interested groups, writing and doing research, especially on teaching, and sitting on committees concerned with teaching and curricula.

### Old Way, New Way

There comes a time when even the best coaching is not enough to help a player overcome an established technical problem. The coach can easily recognise chronic technical problems and tennis performance problems because they just refuse to go away.

New trends in teaching methodology and correction techniques are based on the principle that old knowledge and skills can interfere with and slow down the learning of new knowledge and skills — which is known as the proactive inhibition (PI) effect—. Taking this into consideration, coaches can use the MEDIATIONAL LEARNING technique in correcting their players.

This method consists of the following steps:

- **Preparation:** Both the old way and new way are identified. The player has to differentiate between both approaches.
- **Mediation:** The player has to verbally and physically identify the differences between both skills. This should be done different times until the differences are clear.
- **Application:** The player needs to practice, generalise and apply the newly learned skill as broadly as possible.

It has often been said that practice makes PERFECT. However, we all know that this is not true, but the fact that practice makes PERMANENT is true, and ONLY **PERFECT PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT!!!**

In fact, a quality coaching process needs the commitment of both the coach and the player. The coach has to be committed to work hard, travel, and use his leadership, experience, skills and knowledge to try to help the player as much as he can.

The player needs to commit 110%, which will result in him to training well and competing better. Learning at all times and from all circumstances is also a pre-requisite for quality performance.

Coaches, coaches' educators and tennis scientists have elaborated on the principles of efficient tennis training. Some of them include the following:

- Use the latest available sport science information applied to tennis.
- Integrate coaching knowledge and experience together with the scientific basis of tennis.
- Design and implement sound training programmes
- Recognise different ways to reach the top
- Understand that: "Sometimes it's not what you do but HOW you do it!"

The modern concept of training players of all ages and categories is based on some of the following ideas:

- Adapted to the match / game situation.
- Player centred – individualised.
- Global / Complex / Integrated.
- Based on sport science.
- Preventive / Injury free.
- Aided by technology.

A major shift in teaching methodology has been the catalyst of structuring the teaching and coaching process with the idea of adapting it to the match situation—game based—and thus emphasising the role of strategy and tactics in the initial stages of the game.



Even though during the last years, the ITF has taken a proactive approach on the use and spread of this teaching methodology, more practical / research efforts are needed to convince coaches of the real use and application of the game based approach.

Modern quality coaching is also player centred and individualised. It fully recognises the player as the centre of the coaching process and all efforts should be made to provide for the best assistance possible to help the player achieve his goals.

However, at the same time, another important characteristic of modern quality tennis coaching is the fact that it has to be global, complex and integrated. The relevance of a holistic view of tennis coaching is gaining more and more recognition worldwide. Terms like "integrated or total" tennis training are more common among coaches of all levels. These terms refer to a global vision of tennis training in which all components are integrated and are put into practice using a "complex" training approach.

This new concept for modern tennis training takes into account the importance of tennis as a whole, a holistic approach to coaching, and the principle of integration vs. isolation. It is practically applied following the principle that when working on technical aspects, players are also working tactics, conditioning, mentality, and vice versa since there is an interrelation and interdependence between all of them.

The concept of integrated training for tennis states that the traditional distinction between technique, tactics, conditioning, and mentality is more artificial than real, and that it exists only to understand training related matters, but when playing the match everything comes together!!

Quality coaching is sports science coaching. It is impossible to understand the coaching process at any tennis level without a sound sport science basis, which implies the use of the sport science fundamentals in the daily coaching.

Sport science provides tennis coaching with a much better understanding of almost all aspects of the game since major scientific contributions have helped to develop coaching theories and education. The progressive developments in sports medicine, tennis technology, psychology, training theory and other major sport sciences are having a major impact in the delivery of injury free training programmes for players of all ages and playing levels.

This is the reason why sport science has become a major part of the coach education programmes worldwide. The challenge is now for sport science to become a major part of the player training programmes of all nations.

## **QUALITY COACH EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

The coach plays many roles but both volunteer and professional tennis coaches need education and guidance in how to help tennis players more effectively. Coaches'



education is thus central to the preparation of coaches in the many roles they have to play.

The ITF, National Associations and other tennis, sports, academic and government organisations recommend that all coaches become trained and certified in quality education and certification programmes to ensure that the tennis experience of every player is a good one. The main goals of these programmes include the following:

- Quality coach education courses.
- Quality standards for the recruitment, employment, management and development of coaches.
- Managed, high quality continuous professional development support for employed coaches.
- High quality coaching at all levels of the game.

Modern tennis coaching is becoming increasingly complex. New sport science findings and practices by elite tennis nations indicate that coaching and coaches education programmes have to be up-to-date to be effective.

Coaching effectiveness is largely affected by the quality of decisions made by the coach to fulfil the needs of the people around him—mainly the players. In order to take correct decisions, the coaches should have the skills, knowledge and ethical and social competencies that will help them to do so.

During the last years, especially in Europe, there has been a need to harmonise the coaches' education programmes due to European Union regulations. The basis for the harmonisation are the concepts of learning outcomes and competencies.

Developing a world class coaches education system should:

- Establish infrastructures and systems to provide managed access to qualifications and continuous professional development opportunities linked to player development pathways for coaches.
- Support coaches in accessing continuous professional development opportunities through establishing local structures and coach mentors.
- Establish and co-ordinate a network of tutors to support national associations with the provision of initial coach education and continuous professional development opportunities post qualification.

### **Long Term Player Development (LTPD) and Long Term Coach Development (LTCD)**

Coaches education systems should be both long term player development (LTPD) and long term coach development (LTCD) based. This will help to:

- Increase the opportunities for coaches to develop coaching as a career.
- Increase the number of high-quality active professional coaches.



- Establish sound systems of professional development for coaches.

## Quality Coaching Education

The ITF, together with many National Associations and government organisations are discussing the main components of a quality coaches' education system that can be harmonised worldwide. Its main characteristics are the following:

- Based on international standards (National Occupational Standards for Coaching, Teaching & Instruction already exist).
- Given number of levels and teaching hours, etc.
- Offering opportunities for vertical (coaching more experienced players) and horizontal (gaining more experience in coaching players of the same level) progression (to encourage coaches to continually develop).
- Using a flexible delivery system (different learning systems) so that coaches with diverse needs can learn effectively.
- Building on good practice.
- Addressing core (sport science and other) and tennis specific contents.

## Learning Types and New Learning Systems

Coaches' education programmes typically use formal learning. This type of learning occurs in an organised and structured environment (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view and it typically leads to certification.

Informal (unintentional) and non-formal (intentional) learning results from daily activities such as work, etc., but they do not lead to certification.

There are also other types of learning such as:

- **Integrated teaching:** Teaching complex concepts and skills from a multi-disciplinary approach.
- **Blended learning:** Using a mix of technologies and educational activities in support of identified learning contents.

Blended teaching and learning in an integrated curriculum creates opportunities for learning that are not found in a traditional discipline-specific, pure classroom model. These opportunities include:

- The multi-dimensional analysis of complex issues and concepts.
- The exploration of discipline domain problems from new vantage points.
- The ability to collaborate with students and colleagues in a geographically and socially diverse context.



Thus a combination of formal learning (tutor contact hours) together with supervised practice (in recognised centres/programmes) as well as distance learning, should be considered when defining the curriculum of the courses (training goals, content, methods (including assessment) and material, etc.).

Recognition of prior learning is also a must in the new programmes. Coaches should have their past experiences recognised and view learning as a crucial element of their professional career.

Finally, continuing education and training, as the education or training after initial education or entry into working life, which is aimed at helping individuals to: 1) improve or update their knowledge and/or skills, 2) acquire new skills for a career move or retraining, 3) continue their personal or professional development, should be an integral part of all coaches education programmes.

### **Quality Coaching Certification**

Programmes of coaches education and training— which can be defined as an inventory of activities, learning content and/or methods implemented to achieve education or training objectives (acquiring knowledge, skills or competences), organised in a logical sequence over a specified period of time—, may or may not end with a coaching certification.

Tennis coaches' certifications need social and formal recognition. The first is obvious, the second is a process of granting official status to skills and competences either through the award of certificates or through the grant of equivalence, credit units, validation of gained skills and/or competences

Tennis coaches also need a nationally and may be internationally recognised and transferable professional qualification. We need transparent certifications in order to be able to identify and compare them on the (local, regional, national or international) labour and training markets.

If all parties involved are able to achieve these goals, tennis coaching will be a regulated profession —a professional activity or group of professional activities, and the practice of which (or to one of its forms) is directly or indirectly subject to legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions concerning the possession of specific professional qualifications—.

### **CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE**

Discussion has focused on the accreditation of educational programmes for coaches. The meetings at European level during 2005 have re-energised the issue of educating and certifying tennis coaches, i.e., providing coaches with adequate preparation and assessing competencies as prescribed in the standards of competencies.



We are involved in a validation process of non formal and informal learning in which we will have to assess and recognise a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences, which coaches develop throughout their lives within different environments, for example through education, work and leisure activities.

It seems obvious that there is a need for greater flexibility in the offering of educational programmes for coaches. To this end, the ITF together with other organisations are exploring opportunities for distance learning via computer-based interactive modules. These efforts are in their early developmental stages. However, as the art and science of off-site education develop, the ITF intends to be at the forefront and have the on-line coaches education programme ready for these new avenues of learning.

The challenges change but the dedication is always the same. Coaches should understand the importance of channelling all efforts to the achievement of a goal. In their role of facilitators of the player's performance they should share with them the need for a long term planning, a well studied strategy and a professional knowledge.

Coaches work with players to understand not only their tennis but also their personal needs, offering precise advice and expert professional services, which will be instrumental for the success of the player as a sportsman and as a person.

## CONCLUSION

Quality coaching is the key to successful tennis development in the world since improvements to coaching will provide significant improvements to tennis. National Associations together with the ITF and other tennis organisations should lead and facilitate the development and delivery of enhanced programmes of coach development from grass roots to the elite level.

Performance principles from the elite level should permeate down through the coaches education system so that future generations of coaches can benefit at every level from the school playground to the Olympic arena.

Coaches should think and act with views to the future, this is what it means when we speak about quality coaching for the future.

## REFERENCES

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