



How to Recognise Tennis Talent?

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1) OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENTATION

- Overview of "Talent" and related concepts.
- What research tells us about Talent Identification in sport and tennis.
- Implications & practical solutions.

2) BASIC DEFINITIONS

Talent:

- Potential for success, to become elite, and/or for high level performance.
- The ability to display exceptionally high performance in a domain that requires skills and training.
- Talent is measured by "the rate of improvement in the training situation."

Talent Detection

Refers to non-participants; how can we get potentially talented individuals involved in a sport?

Talent Selection

Choosing those who have a "chance to make it" and rejecting those who do not have this chance. This usually occurs at an early age and has been widely used in autocratic countries (e.g. former East Germany).

Talent Identification

Refers to the process of recognizing current participants with the potential to become elite players. Gifted players are scouted and invited to participate in youth programmes but everybody has a chance to practice and participate in programmes and competitions at an adequate level.

Talent Development

Provision of an optimal learning and training environment for realisation of talent.

3) THE PROPERTIES OF TALENT

- 1.It originates in genetically transmitted structures and hence is at least partly innate.
- 2.Its full effects may not be evident at an early stage, but there will be some early indications, allowing trained people to identify the presence of talent before exceptional standards of mature performance have been demonstrated.
- 3.These early indications of talent provide a basis for predicting who is likely to excel.
- 4.Only a minority are talented; if all children were talented, then there would be no way to predict or explain differential success.
5. Very few individuals are talented in any single domain.
(Howe et al., 1998)

4) TALENT IDENTIFICATION IN TENNIS

Talent identification in tennis is practically “unresearched” (Müller, 1989), and is usually based on results reached at the young age. Usually associations and sponsors do not want to invest in players without good results “on court”. Because of this many talented players, who do not achieve good results early are lost. Tennis coaches believe that they may “smell” talent and do not want to use any science.

Research shows that:

- Different factors determine performance level at early stages of tennis career than at a professional level; therefore on-court results before puberty cannot be used as “predictors” of future performance level.
- Any process of talent identification should detect the level of factors affecting performance in serious tennis, and cannot be based not only on the performance results.
- Talented players cannot have big “gaps” in any important ability or a factor limiting performance, even at the age of 10-12. For example: a slow player can be the champion at the age of 12 but never at the age of 20.
- Since it is almost impossible to develop all predispositions at a maximum level (e.g. speed vs. endurance), talented player ought to have all major abilities (so called limiting factors) at a good (e.g. around average or better) level at his/her disposal.
- There is a need to give coaches and federations a simple and effective tool which will support their “nose and eye” and development programmes.

Ideal Talent Identification programme:

- Is based on achievements of sport science but takes opinions of a coach into account.

- Must be looked upon as a process and not an event and requires constant updating; must have an ongoing longitudinal character (considering changes together with time) with an inter-disciplinary approach, support of academics but dominant role of coaches.
- Should predict potential for future performance with high probability.
- Should assess mainly stable features (having inborn or permanent character).
- Profiling, based on interdisciplinary test, is the best method.
- Procedures should support players' development programme, (answer if sensitive periods were properly used) and start with a relatively large number of potential champions.
- End of each stage is the best moment to do major (more scientific) screening.

It is very important, when analysing results to consider:

- Individual differences in growth, maturation (biological age).
- "Range of acceptability" (in results, in technique, compensational influence of major motor abilities).
- Opinion of individual coach (es) – even best scientific tests do not cover all areas.
- Do not judge/reject/accept too early!

Ideal parameters:

- Anthropometrical data, (incl. biological development).
- Motor abilities, mainly coordination, agility, footwork, speed, power.
- Psychological features/characteristics, (mostly of permanent type, e.g. temperament, achievement motivation, intelligence).
- Technical-tactical skills.
- Social background.
- Speed/Tempo of progress/Trainability/Coachability.
- Performance (not only results) in tournaments.

REFERENCES

Howe, M.J., Davidson, J.W., and Sloboda, J.A. (1998). Innate talents: Reality or myth? *Behavioural & Brain Sciences*, 21, 399-442.

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