



THE COACH AND THE RECESSION

By Peter Farrell (Ireland)

As we all know, 2009 is set to be one of economic uncertainty on a global scale. This of course will effect spending on all goods and services, and especially discretionary spending, into which category tennis coaching certainly falls.

But it is not all doom and gloom. One thing most coaches have in their favour is that the majority of their work is with junior rather than adult players. While people will look for areas where they can cut expense, parents will always be reluctant to force their children to cut back on any positive activity. And tennis lessons at the local Club (or provincially or nationally) is on many levels one of the best things a young person can be involved in (for Jack Groppe's comprehensive list of whats great about the game, see

<http://www.uspta.com/index.cfm?MenuItemID=1933&MenuSubID=581&MenuGroup=New-USPTA-About>).

A newly qualified coach recently asked me for my thoughts on how to survive and even thrive in these new circumstances. Here are a few of the things that came to my mind.

Give 100% in every lesson. You may be tired, it may be your thirtieth session of the week – but it is probably your students first and only tennis lesson of the week!

Give great value for money, and be seen to give great value for money. Among many other things, this means no mobile calls taken or made while teaching. A personal bugbear of mine is to see a coach with hands in pockets, or leaning against the net post or fence for an extended period. These things make it look like you are not working as hard as you could be, and therefore not giving value for money.

Explore innovative and cheap or free marketing techniques. Use email and computer based free text messages to keep your students and prospective students aware of what is coming up. Coaching vouchers can generate many private lessons which might otherwise never happen (see www.tica.ie Christmas Marketing `for a voucher template).

Continue your own education. Sign up for the next level coaching award. Attend workshops, seminars and conferences. Keep up with what is current on the best tennis websites, whether it be free sites or the prime subscription sites such as www.tenniscoach.com. Read the latest books and view the latest DVDs (for reviews of useful books and DVDs, go to <http://www.itftennis.com/coaching/publications/nonitfpubs/index.asp> and http://www.tica.ie/product_reviews.htm). Money spent on these activities is



nothing less than investment in yourself and your career, and it will pay off in the short, medium and long term.

Make your lessons enjoyable. Perhaps this is the most crucial thing of all. Why on earth would people (especially children) choose to attend an activity which they are not enjoying?! Some children might attend because of parental pressure to do so, but the majority will go elsewhere to find what they want.

When I stand outside the tennis court fence to collect my own children from their club coaching session, I hear the other parents greet their kids as they leave the court. There are two questions that most parents ask their children immediately, and guess what, neither have to do with technical or tactical improvements! Those two questions are *'did you have fun?'*, and *'did you enjoy that today?'* Of course we must help our students to progress and improve, but we must do it in a way that generates an enjoyment of and love for the game. If we can achieve this we will have players who will be our pupils for many years to come.

Three key concepts in making your lessons and the game enjoyable:

- ***The ITF's Play and Stay programme*** - use of the red, orange, green system with the ball and court adapted to the players size and skill level. Full details at www.tennisplayandstay.com.
- ***The Games Based Approach*** - maximum activity, maximum possible number of strokes hit per player per session, no lines of players! (see <http://ukpe.humankinetics.com/resourcecentre/book.cfm?isbn=0736045945> for a useful book on this subject).
- ***Appropriate competitive opportunities*** - and more of them. Again there is lots of detail at www.tennisplayandstay.com.

So the new economic circumstances demand new and innovative approaches. The good news is that those who are willing to innovate not only will survive this current downturn, but come out of it at the other end poised to increase and expand their business.