

Overview – Wednesday 9th of June 2004

A Comparative Study of the Tennis Systems in Great Britain, the USA and Germany: Explaining the Lack of International Success in British Tennis

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The Study's Significance

British tennis has had a lack of international success for many decades. Britain has not had a Grand Slam singles winner since Fred Perry (Wimbledon in 1936) and Virginia Wade (Wimbledon in 1977). In contrast, countries like the USA, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Russia, France and Argentina have had much more success. Between 1980 and 2001, American players have won a total of 72 Grand Slam singles titles compared to Germany's 30, Spain's 8, Sweden's 16, Russia's 3, France's 3, and Argentina's 1 – last week, the Argentinean player, Gaston Gaudio, won the French Open by beating his fellow Argentine, Guillermo Coria, in the final.

In June 2004, Britain has 1 man and no women in the top 100. In contrast, the USA has 9 men and 15 women ranked in the top 100 compared to Germany's 4 men and 3 women, Spain's 17 men and 7 women, Russia's 5 men and 13 women, France's 13 men and 8 women, and Argentina's 9 men and 2 women. As a further indication of the state of British tennis today, comparing the world rankings of Britain's top 8 players over the last two decades reveals that the rankings of 5 of the top 8 men were worse in 2002 than they were in 1982, and, alarmingly, the rankings of the top 8 British women have got progressively worse since 1982.

From these statistics, and considering that Britain's two most successful players today are in the final years of their careers (Tim Henman is 29 and Greg Rusedski is 30), British tennis seems to be in a worse position than it was in 1982 and there appears to be little sign of it improving in the immediate future.

The Study's Aim

Following Wimbledon, it is commonplace for tennis commentators, journalists, coaches, players and members of the public to offer their opinions why British players do not do as well as players from other countries. Some blame the rigid 'class' system, some blame the lack of facilities, whilst others blame coaching standards. Amazingly, there has been no in-depth research into the reasons for Britain's lack of success. This study's aim was to see why British tennis has had a

lack of success, and, by making comparisons with the USA and Germany, the study also aimed to see how success has been achieved elsewhere.

As personal talent alone cannot explain a country's lack of tennis success, this study firstly considered geographical and cultural factors (e.g. weather, history, sport, the media, the education system, and common attitudes and lifestyles) before looking at each country's tennis system, which comprise of the competitive opportunities, the national tennis association, and the main places where elite players develop.

The Methods Used

Trips were made around Britain, and to the USA and Germany. In Britain, research was carried out at the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), academies, private squads, school programmes, universities and clubs. In the USA, research was carried out at the United States Tennis Association (USTA), university programmes, academies, country clubs, and public courts. In Germany, the Deutsche Tennis Bund (DTB), clubs and regional federations were looked at. A total of 91 interviews were conducted of senior staff of the national tennis associations, and leading coaches and players, many of whom are internationally renowned tennis experts. The interviewees included Patrice Hagelauer (the LTA's former Performance Director), Anne Pankhurst (the LTA's Coach Education Director), Nick Brown (the British Federation Cup Captain), David Lloyd (a former British Davis Cup Captain), Julie Pullin (former British number 1), Arvind Parmar (a British Davis Cup player), Lynne Rolley (the USTA's former Head of Women's Tennis), Paul Lubbers (the USTA's Director of Coach Education), Chris Evert (former world number 1), Tara Snyder (a former US Open Junior Champion), Professor Karl Weber (a former DTB President), Heinz-Peter Born (the DTB's Director of Coach Education), Dirk Hordorff (personal coach of the current German number 1 Rainer Schuettler), and Christine Singer (a former German Federation Cup player). The interview transcripts were analysed and common opinions were grouped into categories. Observations were made, for example at tournaments (whilst attending and competing in national and international tournaments) and at clubs, academies, universities and public facilities. Content analyses of literature (e.g. books, national statistics, newspaper articles, pamphlets and journal articles) were also carried out.

To provide an insight into the tennis systems and how success has been achieved in countries other than Britain, the USA and Germany, interviews of national tennis association staff, coaches and players from Russia, Argentina, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and New Zealand were carried out. Also, by making cross-references with other sports, such as football, cycling, running and hockey, mainly by content analysis of books, it was possible to gain an understanding of the mentalities of other successful sports men and women and how they have achieved sporting success.

The Main Findings

There are a number of factors relating to the tennis systems and cultures that may begin to explain why British tennis has had a lack of success compared to the USA and Germany.

- (1) Britain has the smallest population (over 58 million) compared to the USA (over 274 million) and Germany (over 82 million), and it also has the fewest people who play tennis (3.5 million) and the fewest people who play competitively (over 46,500). Therefore, Britain has the least probability for producing players.
- (2) Due to there being more hours of sunshine and higher temperatures, the USA's weather is more conducive to playing tennis all-year-round, particularly in the southern states of Florida and California where many of the country's elite tennis programmes are concentrated. The British and German climates are not dissimilar, with high rainfall being a particular characteristic of both countries, necessitating the need to have to play indoors for a large part of the year.
- (3) Germany has approximately four times the number of courts than Britain, and, importantly, it has considerably more indoor courts (most clubs have indoor facilities), thus there is more opportunity for players to practice all-year-round.
- (4) The profile of sport and the importance placed on sport in society, schools (including the time allocated to sport during the school day and after it) and universities, is highest in the USA, and although tennis is not one of the top few sports in the USA (neither is it in Britain and Germany), the general attitudes towards sport, and striving to do well in it, extend to tennis. In Germany, the school day typically ends between 12 pm and 1 pm, which provides young Germans substantial time to play tennis during the week after school, most commonly at their local club. In contrast, the typical school day in Britain doesn't end until 3.30 pm.
- (5) The British media can be highly critical and negative towards its sports men and women, including its tennis players, much more so than the media in other countries. The media's treatment can be detrimental to the performances of British players, and, importantly, to their attitudes, which can lead to players developing a 'fear of failure' mentality and players being reluctant to try to reach the very top.
- (6) The negativity and criticism that was apparent in the British media is indicative of a trend in British culture generally. For example, being jealous of success is a common feature of British culture as is criticising those who try to achieve and fail. In stark contrast, attitudes in the USA's media and culture are very positive. There is a high level of patriotism in the country, and its culture encourages enterprise, achievement, and is more likely to foster its people having a winning mentality. Similarly, being competitive and striving

for success are also features of German culture, but are subtler than in the USA.

- (7) British players have long been accused of apathy and lacking the hunger and desire necessary to win at the top level in tennis. This is influenced by the comfortable standard of living and lifestyle common in British society, particularly its youth population. The lifestyles of young Britons that nowadays feature going to pubs and nightclubs, watching TV, and consuming alcohol, cigarettes and drugs, offer an explanation why many British players fail to progress from being top juniors to becoming successful professionals, because they lose sight of their tennis aspirations and are instead tempted to do what other young people are doing.
- (8) As is a trend in many developed countries including Britain, the USA and Germany, fitness-related pursuits, such as gym training, are becoming increasingly popular, which is arguably decreasing the number of people playing tennis. This seems to mirror the current trend for vain, narcissistic and individually based leisure pursuits in the Western world.
- (9) The decreasing role of the family in British society, which is highlighted by the fact that Britain has the highest divorce rate in Europe, may, to an extent, be hindering Britain producing top players. This is because to be successful at international level, a stable and happy home life is thought to be important. The high number of broken homes can be linked to young people having lowered self-esteem, self-confidence, self-belief and motivation, which are character traits that are usually necessary for tennis players to be successful. In comparison, it can be suggested that the values of the traditional family and religion have been upheld to a greater extent in the USA and Germany.
- (10) In the USA, there are many public courts that have floodlights, are free to play on, and are an acrylic hard court surface (a surface similar to what approximately 30% of the professional tournaments are played on). In contrast, Britain's public courts tend to be a poor quality macadam surface (not one event on the world tour is held on this surface), are not free to play on, and lack floodlights. The provision of public courts is important, because in the USA they have frequently been where many top players first took up the game and practiced as juniors.
- (11) University tennis programmes in the USA provide extensive opportunities for elite players to progress to play professionally. The high numbers of tennis scholarships that are available provide aspiring players to have an intensive tennis programme combined with academic study for 4 years, for free. Tennis scholarships provide the opportunity for daily practice sessions, a high standard of regular team and individual competition, access to high quality facilities, and access to other elite players to practice with and be around. In comparison, university tennis scholarships in Britain are significantly fewer in number and don't feature such high standards of players or competitive opportunities. Consequently, few players from British universities go on to become successful professional players as scholars in the USA regularly do.

- (12) In Britain there are a multitude of court surfaces including grass, artificial grass, macadam, artificial clay, and clay courts, of which there are very few. This lack of surface continuity, and the fact that 3 of the 6 men's and all 3 of the women's main international tour events held in Britain are on grass, is detrimental to Britain's chances of producing internationally successful players. In contrast, Germany's dominant surface is clay, which is renowned as the ideal surface for developing top players (each year 65% of professional tournaments are held on clay). In the USA, acrylic hard court is the dominant surface and, as approximately 30% of the world's professional tournaments are held on this type of surface each year, it too is a suitable surface for elite player development.
- (13) Britain offers the fewest competitive opportunities for aspiring players. In 2002, it held 38 professional tournaments compared to 115 in the USA and 50 in Germany. It was therefore concluded that pursuing a career as a professional player in Britain is particularly problematic and costly, as players often have to travel overseas in order to progress in the professional ranks.

In addition to these factors, there were a number of key findings that were most significant to success.

- (1) Historically, Britain has featured and, to a large extent, been shaped by a ruling, upper class. The class system has had an enduring effect on British culture and British sport, including tennis. Tennis was originally played on the lawns of private homes and at members-only clubs, giving the sport an elitist image, the remnants of which can still be seen in aspects of British tennis today. Little importance was placed on competition and training, and this has led to Britain traditionally failing to adequately cater for elite player development. Consequently, there are no well-established routes for top players to progress to become internationally successful. In contrast, tennis in the USA has historically focused on achieving international success and thus it has emphasised the importance of practice, training and competition. This can be linked to how throughout history, victory and achievement have been common features of the USA's culture, highlighted by its role in wars and its capitalist political-economic system. Academies and the college scholarship system have become established routes that have led to the emergence of many top American players. In Germany, clubs have become established places for tennis, not only for players of all ages and standards to come and enjoy the on-court and off-court opportunities that clubs provide, but also for top players to develop. German tennis success can also be linked to the two World Wars because of the enduring effects they have had on the mentalities of Germans (for example, fostering the right work ethic and discipline to achieve success). Those who experienced hardship and struggle following defeat in the Second World War in particular led to an evolving German mentality, which enabled the country to become a leading world

power. In summary, unlike the USA and Germany, high quality elite player development programmes in Britain are limited to the odd club, academy, private squad or school, which has led to many aspiring British players choosing to base their tennis in other countries such as Spain and the USA.

- (2) Britain also lacks a highly organised and extensive team competition. The USA has university matches and Germany has inter-club league tennis, which provide their aspiring players significant competitive opportunities in addition to the international events that are held.

- (3) Tennis clubs have been integral to German success. The main reasons have been:
 - The provision of subsidised and free coaching for the club's leading players
 - A social, youth club environment for juniors and a pub-like environment for adults
 - Access to outdoor clay courts and indoor courts
 - The opportunity to represent the club in league matches

Clubs in Britain have traditionally failed to offer these opportunities. In contrast to British clubs, German clubs not only provide opportunities, both on and off the court, for the junior and adult sections to run alongside each other in a harmonious way (in contrast, British clubs have long been regarded as not being junior friendly), they have also enabled players to reach a sufficiently high standard to be able to progress to play professionally. The role of clubs in Germany's success, and the way they are organised and the opportunities they provide, were found to be similar to clubs in other European countries, such as Sweden, France and Belgium, and also in Southern hemisphere countries, such as South Africa and Argentina.

- (4) Few top players develop in their national tennis association's player development programmes. Despite being linked to these programmes at times during their careers, most top players developed in independent, private schemes. In recent years, the LTA, USTA and DTB have similarly changed their approaches to elite player development. Instead of insisting selected juniors live and base their tennis at national centres, which meant living away from home, they have now recognised this is unpopular and has been a factor in their programmes not producing top players in the past. They now allow players to base their tennis more locally, at their club, academy or regional centre for example, in the hope that this approach will lead to success in the future. Despite this new approach, it seems unlikely that the national associations will consistently produce top players as there were



many negative opinions regarding their programmes for elite players. One of the main criticisms about the LTA's programme related to its monopolistic approach to player development and its reluctance to support players involved in independent programmes. The other main criticisms were:

- Not taking into account a player's preferences for where they would like to be based and where they would be happy
- Overlooking late developers
- Providing too much financial support to the leading few players, which can result in them having a spoilt mentality and decreasing their hunger and desire to succeed
- The lack of consistency in the way coaching is provided
- Not appointing coaches who possess the necessary knowledge and experience to guide players from the junior to professional ranks
- Employing staff with a 'yes man' mentality, who are often not in their positions on merit, but because they have behaved in a conformist way

(5) There has been an over-emphasis on juniors achieving success in Britain. This was linked to the LTA (for example, the high number of funded trips it sends juniors on to compete in international junior events around the world), and also to the whole British tennis system. Junior success can translate to senior success, but it has been rare in Britain. The two main reasons for this were:

- Primarily coaches, and also parents, placing too much emphasis on players winning in the junior age groups, which leads to players failing to sufficiently develop all aspects of their game. Instead, juniors often adopt a defensive and consistent style of play in order to win. When these juniors attempt to make the transition to professional tennis, they realise they have neglected developing their game sufficiently enough to win at senior level, which leads to them failing to achieve success, and very often leads to them quitting the game altogether.
- Britain's juniors adopting a defensive and consistent style of play because they fear losing. This mentality is common due to the critical nature of the British media and British culture generally, and young players wanting to avoid being criticised for losing.

(6) Poor coaching standards have had an important influence on Britain's lack of success. For example, senior British players have often found themselves with technical deficiencies because of poor coaching when they were juniors. One of the main issues related to coaching standards in Britain was the failure of British coaches to have sufficient knowledge and experience of developing top players. This was linked to British coaches not having played at the top level, and, as it is possible to acquire the necessary knowledge by



learning, to the lack of an effective coach education programme. The LTA provides the main coach education programme in Britain, which was criticised for failing to recruit personnel who have played at, or have coached players to play at, the highest level. The conclusion was that British coaches trying to develop top players would be significantly aided by having an effective coach education programme that is provided by staff who are skilled teachers, have achieved international success as players, and are experienced in coaching players through the progressions from when they take up the sport through to professional level.

- (7) The mentalities of players have an important influence on success. British players were often said to lack real hunger, desire, mental toughness, and drive. They were also said to make too many excuses, and to not want to become the best badly enough. This was linked to the general living standards in Britain and the general lack of a success-orientated mentality not being common in British culture. Success in other countries was linked to players having the right mentality, either because they have endured hardship and struggle in their lives and want to improve their living standard (e.g. players from Eastern European and South American countries), or because their culture had fostered them having a success-orientated mentality (e.g. in the USA, Germany and Australia). Success was also linked to players having an innate drive and ambition to desperately want to succeed, which was often fuelled by their passion for their sport. Players developing the right mentality for success was also linked to the influence of the people and the environments they were exposed to: their parents and home life, and where they played tennis, for example.

Recommendations To Lead to British Success in the Future

Some initial suggestions that would begin to improve the situation of British tennis include:

- (1) The Government to provide greater funding (ideally in the form of grants not loans) for building courts, particularly indoor courts, at voluntarily run clubs.
- (2) The Government to increase the time allocated to sport in schools, and, in conjunction with the LTA, to increase the provision of tennis as part of school sport.
- (3) The British media to adopt a less critical and negative style of reporting, and instead to focus on more positive aspects of British tennis (as opposed to concentrating on British players when they fail to achieve international success) in an attempt to raise the sport's profile.
- (4) To have a regular terrestrial TV programme devoted to tennis to try to increase the interest in tennis and enhance its profile.
- (5) To increase the number of clay courts available at clubs.



The key suggestions to try to improve British tennis and lead to international success in the future were:

- (6) Regarding the LTA's governing of British tennis generally, recommendations include:
- a) Putting greater effort and finance into the promotion of tennis, raising the sport's profile and increasing participation
 - b) Providing and encouraging the provision of more opportunities for non-elite players to improve and remain part of the British system (particularly those in the their mid-teens to early 30s)
 - c) Discouraging staff developing a conformist, 'yes man' mentality
 - d) Appointing highly-experienced individuals in senior positions within the LTA who have a good knowledge of the game

Regarding the LTA's role in player development, recommendations include:

- e) Increasing the draw sizes of the lower tier professional tournaments (particularly the qualifying draws), thus increasing the opportunities for aspiring players.
 - f) To have a more flexible approach in the support it provides players, either by working closely with independent schemes or by handing them the responsibility of developing players, and by spreading its funding among more players in an attempt to avoid them developing a 'spoilt' mentality
 - g) Employing more experienced coaches (from abroad if necessary), and maintaining greater consistency in the coaching it provides.
 - h) To encourage coaches, players and parents to view junior tennis as a preparatory period leading up to senior tennis. This can be done by not placing too high an importance on winning junior tournaments, by ensuring juniors develop the correct techniques as well as varied styles of play, and by encouraging players to play more senior events and fewer junior tournaments from the age of 16.
- (7) The British tennis system vitally needs to provide a route and an environment where elite players can develop, be it in clubs, academies, private squads, university scholarships or school programmes. The environment needs to provide a place where people can acquire a love and passion for the game, where they are happy and 'want' to be, where they can be with friends, and where they have pleasurable experiences, both on and off the court. The environment needs to provide the opportunity for juniors to receive a high

standard of coaching (both individual and group sessions), the opportunity to play in organised sessions as well as playing amongst themselves in an unsupervised manner, the opportunity to play all-year round (therefore indoor courts must be available), and sufficient singles and doubles competitive opportunities at junior and senior level. In the British system, clubs provide the most realistic location for creating this environment, and offer the most potential for providing a route for developing internationally successful players in the future. Sustained attention and funding in clubs, primarily by the LTA and ideally by local and central government also, is necessary. As in clubs in Europe, British clubs should strive to attract sponsorship to enable them to offer free and subsidised coaching for the most committed juniors. If these recommendations are acted upon, clubs could become an established elite player development route, which is something successful tennis nations have had and Britain has lacked.

- (8) To improve coaching standards in British tennis, it was recommended that a coach education programme be provided that encourages coaches to:
- a) Not strictly adhering to standard coaching methods and practices,
 - b) Be totally committed, enthusiastic and positive,
 - c) To develop the young player's mind,
 - d) To maintain consistency and continuity in the coaching process,
 - e) To keep coaching simple,
 - f) To continue to learn about the game using formal and informal means,
 - g) To strive to attain as high a playing level as possible,
 - h) To learn to be effective teachers and communicators,
 - i) To provide a positive, stimulating, challenging and happy coaching environment.

Final Thought

British players can generally have no excuse for not achieving international success, despite this study's explanations why they haven't in the past. This is because players from less developed countries have been able to achieve significant international success whilst having fewer opportunities.

Quotes from Interviewees

(1) Arvind Parmar (British Davis Cup player) said about the British media:

"They (the British media) build up Tim (Henman) so much as if he's expected to win Wimbledon and when he doesn't they lay into him and say how he will never have what it takes to be a winner which is completely unfair when you



consider he has made the semi-finals twice and the quarter finals twice in the last four Wimbledon Championships and has been ranked in the top 10 for a couple of years.”

(2) Andrew Foster (a former LTA-funded player who reached the 4th round of the Wimbledon men’s singles in 1993) said about British culture:

“We (British people) have a tendency to criticise all the time and this negativity filters down to all aspects of life in Britain.”

He said about players developing within the LTA’s programme:

“When a player is part of the LTA’s system it is like being in an ocean. There is little personal commitment and care for you from the LTA’s coaches, partly because there is a lack of consistency in the coaching and players are frequently given different coaches. The player’s place in the LTA system on LTA squads and receiving LTA funding is dependent on results and winning and if he or she fails to have good results and has a loss of form, they soon find themselves dumped. It is like a young fish in the ocean; the fish is forced to swim from early on or else it will drown in the currents of the ocean. This means the fish cannot afford to take the time to develop gradually. For this fish, it is also hard to find direction in the vast ocean, which is similar to being part of the LTA set-up as you are one of many players. In a private scheme, there is more care and attention for the individual from coaches. It is smaller and more personal and the player feels happier and more positive in this type of environment. Therefore the player is more likely to succeed and plus the player has more time to develop their game and not be over-concerned about winning. Similarly, in a stream the fish will find it easier to develop as it is not forced to survive as the fish in the ocean have to”.

(3) Charles Applewhaite (the LTA’s former Coach Education Director) said about the attitudes of adult club members towards one of his junior players, Anne Hobbs (a former British number 1):

“I tried to get her playing in the ladies team at the club, but they were so opposed to the idea of a young girl playing in ‘their team’ even though she was already an international junior player and was the best player in the club by a long way. They were unwilling to have her playing in the team and it just gave me the impression they had their little group of friends at the club who they’d pick from for the team. You’d think they’d feel proud to have a top player play for them who had grown up playing at the club.”

(4) Patrice Hagelauer (the LTA’s former Performance Director) said about the importance of clubs to France’s success:



“You have to provide loads of matches and competitions for kids in a non-pressured club setting. Do this as part of a good junior programme and you will have the situation which has been a common occurrence in France whereby youngsters learn the game at the club, progress through their junior years by being coached at the club and having easy access to local competitions in the club and against local clubs in leagues, and then can develop to play at professional level.”

He said about government funding in French tennis:

“In France, the money allocated to sport by the national and local governments means the FFT (Federation Francais de Tennis) does not have to spend money on building facilities. It also means tennis clubs and centres have lower expenses as the cost of building courts and facilities is provided for meaning that the cost of playing and club membership is much lower, this means for the people it is more cheaper to play tennis.”

He said that sport in France is viewed as not just being concerned with producing champions, but as having other benefits too, such as having less people in hospital, more children having something to do rather than hang around the streets, integrating minority sections of the population, and leading to a happier nation. He said:

“..when people pay taxes, they know some of their money is for their children’s benefit as it is for sport.”

(5) Gordon Birt (a former Vice-Chairman of the South African Tennis Coaches Association and former coach of Wayne Ferreira and Amanda Coetzer) said decision-makers in British tennis must possess:

“...the right experience, understanding, perspective and knowledge of tennis.”

(6) Julie Pullin (former British number 1) said about the LTA’s funding of players:

“If the LTA funded more players less, a greater number of players would be given an opportunity, the players would be more dedicated, they would practice and train harder and would appreciate the support they were given more.”

(7) Hannah Collin (former British number 1) said about the mentalities of British players:



“It is definitely apparent that players from other countries don’t have the privileges we do when we are away at events and this may explain why it doesn’t hurt enough when we lose. For many players like the Eastern Europeans, losing would often mean not being able to afford to stay in a hotel as they had less prize money. It would not be surprising to find them sleeping in the club house or in the changing rooms.”

(8) David Lloyd (a former British Davis Cup Captain) said the LTA’s seemingly total control of tournaments, ratings, player development, coach education and awarding wildcards, is a luxury other national federations don’t have because they lack the necessary funds to be in a position to do so. He believes this makes it very hard for players to succeed if they are not involved with the LTA and not “part of the system”. Lloyd believes the LTA should relinquish some of its responsibilities. By doing so, and allowing aspects such as tournaments, player development, coach education and schools tennis, to be independently organised, it would reduce the LTA’s control, but may also improve each aspect’s effectiveness. He especially believes the LTA should allow the tournaments department to be independently run, which would eradicate the monopoly of player ratings and wildcards to tournaments that many believe exist, and thus it would “make it a fairer system”.

(9) Nick Brown (the British Federation Cup Captain) said about the lack of top British women:

“You see the Russian girls, and their parents smack them if they lose. They just have to win to put food on the table. It means so much more to them so it’s easy to see how their attitudes have formed and why they reach the top. Another reason for the failings of Brits is that there is too much pressure for juniors to win. I think the ratings system needs to be scrapped, because it’s not right that kids are so desperate to win in order to get ratings points so their ratings get higher, and can then get into more events. Jane was on the fringe of being in the top few girls in Britain. She could beat a lot of those were at the top, but they didn’t develop their games enough, and played too many matches in my view, then when they lost they’d get tight and down on themselves. Parents use ratings as a benchmark too, which is not right.”

(10) Sue Barker (former British number 1 and French Open singles winner) said about the failure of British juniors to progress as pros:

“There’s no real reason as far as I can see. It’s just up to the individual and whether he or she really wants it. I was desperate to make it. Nothing was going to stop me. Our players today can’t have any excuses really.”

She compared the attitudes to sport in other countries to attitudes in Britain:



“I’ve been to other countries around the world recently also, with John Lloyd and Chris Evert, because they’ve been opening academies in partnership. There is just a different culture to sport. People treat it differently and their attitudes to sport and to tennis aren’t what you find in Britain. In Britain the school day is too long. It seems the education system over here is thought to be too important. Kids have so many exams and they aren’t encouraged to consider a career in sport is a serious option. They aren’t told that they can play sport and return to school after if they need be or carry on studying whilst they are travelling for their tennis. Playing tennis around the world is such an education in life anyway. The whole time you have to arrange getting around, organise your practice and accommodation. You have to learn how to deal with people and the press, interviews, crowds of people watching you etc. I was just lucky my school allowed me to pursue a career in tennis. I didn’t chuck school in completely. The nuns were proud of me. They even came to watch me at Wimbledon.”

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