

Talent in Sports Is Never Enough: A Preliminary Qualitative Data Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Sports development of young and talented athletes is a very dynamic process which includes an ample range of challenges and obstacles. The aim of this research is a qualitative analysis of experiences of tennis players' with a lower-range of efficiency as senior players. The attempt was to identify those factors that prevented efficiency in senior competitions for tennis players who achieved excellent results in junior competitions. A particular emphasis was directed towards three domains which were presented as key factors for a successful athletic career in previous research (specialisation in the chosen sport, environmental impact on sports development and negative life events/circumstances). A series of polystructural interviews with tennis players in senior competitions were conducted (N = 10). The obtained data indicate several factors with a negative impact on the successful development of young and talented tennis players, as follows: premature specialisation, insufficient commitment to the training process, lack of adequate support by the parents and coach, failure to make proper and timely decisions regarding one's own sports development, injuries and insufficient financial means. The identification of key factors in the sports development of young athletes can be of crucial relevance for quality guidance and direction in sports careers of talented athletes.

Key words: tennis, talent, early specialization, social capital, challenge

Introduction

Talent is often overrated and frequently misunderstood¹. When people achieve great results, others often explain their accomplishments by simply attributing them to talent. Quite often, that is a false and misleading way of looking at success. If talent alone is enough, then we will witness all highly talented people being always highly successful. However, that is not the case. In sport, we see many players with world/European youth/junior achievements, but no performances at this level as seniors. Successful athletes emphasize that the path to their sports accomplishments was an extremely complex process in which talent presents only a starting point². There are numerous factors that affect successful sports careers. Athletes are faced with various demands or stressful situations (e.g. preparation periods and competitions, expectations, opponents, etc.), demanding living environments (e.g. parents and coaches, selections, officials, etc.), as well as individual personal life events (e.g. early departure from family home, injuries, finances, etc.). In such demanding circumstances, certain athletes manage to with-

stand or even improve under the afore-mentioned pressure of their environment and achieve top-level results, whereas others succumb in front of such demands and regress^{3,4,5}. Research results thus show that more important factors in the development of sports careers are so-called sport specialization, environmental impact and numerous positive and negative life events.

Due to the large number of youths participating in sport globally, researchers have attempted to better understand common sport pathways, and the benefits or consequences of sport participation. For example, top-level tennis players experienced a later specialisation and trained less than their peers between the ages of 13 and 15, while their training significantly intensified after reaching the age of 15⁶. Most top-level tennis players in junior competitions (70%) started their specialisation at the age of 10.4, whereas 95% of them started their specialisation before reaching the age of 18⁷. Certain researchers regard sport specialization to be a reflection of highly developed societies and consider it useful for success in cer-

tain sports, however, they also think it is potentially dangerous in terms of physiological/physical, psychological and sociological risks for young individuals⁸.

Many individuals and groups have a marked effect on the development of athletes, whereas the influence of the coach and family are of particular importance⁹. It is impossible to fully predict which individual shall develop into a top-level tennis player on the basis of talent alone, as there are numerous external factors with significant influence on the development and achievement of top-level results in tennis⁶.

Various traumatic experiences can likewise be a disturbing factor in the achievement of sports results¹⁰. In the developmental path of young and talented athletes, a traumatic event can be playing outside one's age group, playing in a different position on the team, selection for certain competitions, significant increase of training load, as well as injuries or lack of financial resources¹¹. At the same time, traumatic experiences can also have a positive effect on a player's performance, as well as entice motivation and stimulate learning¹².

Success in sports is a complex and arduous process, and it is under the influence of many different psychological, physical, social and organizational factors^{13,14}. In tennis, there are many important factors that influence success, like well-rounded athletic development and positive environmental support. In order to provide support in the development of young and talented athletes, it is essential to understand the factors which can have a positive or negative influence on their developmental path¹⁰. There is much evidence of experiences in the life of young athletes who endure both ups and downs, and have dynamic paths during their sports careers^{15,16,17,18,19}. In-line with the above-mentioned, we hypothesized that early sport specialization, insufficient social capital and support, as well as high incidence of traumas may be associated with a poor performance at the senior level. However, few studies have simultaneously examined the contribution of different developmental factors to sport performance.

Accordingly, in the present study, we investigated the influences of different factors – sport specialization, the role of coaches and significant others in sports development, and the incidence and different types of trauma (i.e., injuries) – on the performance level among a sample of participants with world/European youth/junior achievements, but no performances at this level as seniors. Given the aims of the study, and with particular reference to the talent group identified in the title, we purposefully sampled a group of participants from tennis.

Material and Methods

Participants

Each participant was matched as closely as possible on basic background characteristics (i.e., gender, years in sport, performance achievements, nationality, educational

level) to facilitate comparison. Accordingly, 10 male players were selected and interviewed (aged 25–39 years). Participants were classified by their achievement in world/European youth/junior competitions, but with no performances at this level as seniors (ranked from 543 to 1435 on the professional ranking ATP list). In all cases, participants were either still active or had retired within the last 3 years when interviewed.

Procedure

The participants meeting the criteria outlined above were invited to participate through direct personal contact (non-random sampling). All participants agreed to take part and completed an informed consent, the study having been approved through the University Ethics Committee. Data collection was organized in three phases using a semi-structured interview method. To ensure an optimum personal context to the data, it was crucial that each participant was able to relate his or her experiences clearly to the key stages that applied to their own careers^{10,20}. This approach has been previously shown to increase the accuracy and veracity of recall^{10,21} and was an important step to help overcome some of the limitations of retrospective recall inherent in this type of data collection, by ensuring participants anchored their recall of incidents to particular times and events.

The first phase of the research was establishing contact with potential participants via electronic mail. The second phase referred to making direct contact via telephone, as part of which the participants were briefly presented with the procedure, aim and topic of this research. The third phase included the implementation of the interview with the participant. The interviews were conducted in quiet and isolated places so that environmental factors (e.g. noise, lighting, weather conditions) would not affect the participant's answers. The interview was implemented in Croatian with nine participants, while one participant's interview was conducted in English. A default conversation structure was created in advance (so-called interview guide) and it was identical for each research participant. Each question in the interview guide was open-ended, thus yielding a variety of responses that were pertinent to each participant. The interview was based on three different topics (beginning of sport specialization, environmental influence on sports development, negative life events/circumstances in sports and private surroundings) that, according to previous findings, have a direct influence on one's sports success.

Design and Analysis

At the beginning of the interview, each participant was presented in detail with the aim and purpose of the research. For the purpose of subsequent interview transcription and analysis, the interviews were recorded with both a tape recorder and video camera, which the participants were all informed on and were required to sign an informed consent. Each participant was guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of personal data. They were

allowed to withdraw from the research at any given moment. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, with each interview lasting between 60 and 90 min. After reading and re-reading the transcriptions, qualitative analysis software (QSR NVIVO 9) was used to transform raw data units into thematic hierarchies by recursively engaging in tag creation, category creation and category organization^{10,22}.

All interviews were conducted by a third author who enhanced trust and rapport with interviewees via appreciation of their history and current situation, and the demands of the general/specific elite performance and development experiences.

Results

The results of the analysed data were presented in such a way to explain as best possible the key factors in the sports development of young athletes. Should we take into consideration the comprehensive development of their careers, it is clear that a wide range of key components was included. In this research, emphasis was put on significant circumstances that may have an effect on a higher or lower success of perspective athletes, while the analysis was implemented with consideration to the beginning of sport specialization (early, optimal, late specialization and dedication to the training process), support from the environment (parents, coaches, school and friends, as well as making proper and timely decisions regarding one's own sports development), traumatic experiences and negative life events (occurrence of injuries and lack of adequate financial resources, etc.). Upon the completion of data analysis, a large number of relevant information was obtained on elements that affected the development of young athletes' careers. These valuable impressions and the large amount of obtained information shall be presented via certain examples of quotations within the key topics in this research.

Specialization

Adequate implementation of sport specialization is a highly complex and demanding process during which one must consider many things. The relationship between calendar and biological age of a child, the level of one's motor abilities and skills, as well as the level of mental and emotional development are all of great importance. In respect to the afore-mentioned segments and numerous other ones for the evaluation of a child, the teacher or coach must know in which manner and in which moment to start with sport specialization in order for it to be implemented in an optimal way. Sport specialization is increasingly being introduced at an ever-earlier age as the coach and parents aim at accomplishing top-level results as soon as possible. Upon conducting the interviews with the participants, it was noticed that almost all of them experienced a very early beginning of more serious tennis training, while a smaller number of participants were also engaged in other types of sports activities except for tennis during their

developmental years. The above-mentioned consistently appeared during the interviews with the participants, and below we shall highlight certain examples:

Personally, I don't really remember, but I think that it was around the age of five and a half. My father would strike the tennis ball against the wall, while my sister and I wanted to try and shouted: "Let me try, let me try". After that, we both signed up for lessons at a tennis school, but it wasn't about playing tennis for us, it was just fun.

A couple of friends from my school started going to tennis training. I was interested so I also wanted to try it. I was seven years old.

I was on the tennis court at the age of three already and that was my path. My entire family played tennis. My brother also played, while my father finished a training programme for a tennis coach and was then hired as a coach at a tennis club.

Most participants had a similar early beginning. For example, one of the participants described how it came for him to choose tennis, i.e. who initiated for the choice to be to play tennis:

My physical education teacher was a private coach and he asked my parents: "Would you like for your child to try it?" And that was how it started little by little, and then came my first tournaments. I love all sports; I played basketball with my brother in my free time, as well as football and water polo among other sports.

Most participants emphasized that they were glad to start with more focused and intensive tennis training:

When I started training at the age of five and a half, I only trained tennis and I simply loved it, but I do think that I began too early with serious training.

I started early, when I was eight or nine years old, with a more individualized approach, i.e. more serious training, which was at that time the only possible option.

I went from group to individualized trainings around when I was eight years old, and that was an early beginning.

Ever since I was six years old, I was on the tennis court all day long. At that time, I already spent around six, seven hours at tennis trainings.

It was interesting to notice how many of the participants emphasized that their character was more in line with playing a team sport, and that, from this perspective, it seemed to them that tennis (as a distinctly individual sport) was not the best choice. They all stated that they love tennis as a sport, however, some of the participants felt better when they play team sports, and their performance was always better in team tennis competitions (i.e., Davis Cup, national tennis leagues, etc.). One of the participants points out the following:

I think I am more of a team player, as ever since I was little, when I started playing in pairs, I didn't

have any volleys, or some strokes, but in doubles I was 200% better, I was more relaxed.

In a team sport there are for example eleven of us on the field, or six or seven, so if you have a setback, someone else can cover for you.

My performance was better in team competitions! I don't know what the exact reasons are for it, but I think it is because of the group organization, the training system, and because of the team.

The reaction of the participants to the challenges of growing up in sports, in terms of a smaller or bigger town or city, showed a high level of awareness on certain advantages and disadvantages. The participants believe that the size of the city definitely affects the beginning of the specialization. A positive experience and positive attitude was described as follows:

There are both advantages and disadvantages in growing up in a small town. The good side of living in a small town is that there are less people and I would say that a good result gets you recognized rather fast, and people follow you after that.

However, growing up in a smaller city where as athletes they did not have many options, i.e. the opportunity to train in other sports, directed them towards an earlier specialization. A bigger city provides many more options in terms of a versatile development, as well as a wider possibility in choosing professional coaching teams. Thus, one of the participants stated the following:

In a big city there are surely more quality coaches and you certainly have a greater choice if you are looking for a private coach. It is a fact that you also have the opportunity of doing other sports, so at a certain point you can make a far better decision on what best works for you.

During the interview, the participants often mentioned the element of dedication to the training process, so that the mentioned topic showed to be very important in the segment of realizing one's potential in tennis that they all demonstrated at an early age. The obtained data allow for noticing a significant influence of the surrounding situation. Setting adequate challenges, both by the coach and by their environment, affected the participants' dedication; however, their influence was usually brief and inconsistent. The participants made a point that they still were not committed and enthusiastic all the way in their training:

Motivation, dedication, i.e. passion for tennis are key, but I did not feel that way about tennis, I felt that way about sports in general.

I would say that one should give 100% of what he has got, and this means maximum focus on what you are doing, that is what's key for attaining the final goal. I was always missing something!

When at this point now I analyse what my opponents at that time had, who are now successful tennis players, and I didn't have, then I would say it is discipline! The ones who were successful were truly disci-

plined and they were in it with 500%. Unfortunately, I wasn't.

One of the participants explained his lower level of dedication in relation to other players as a result of his love for other sports, as well as for competing in them:

Others avoided playing different sports in fear of getting injured, but I was always tempted to play futsal, handball or basketball, whatever I could.

Social support (family, coach, school and friends)

It is characteristic for all the participants that they had a lot of support from their friends and at school. However, there was also an important role by other factors in their development, and it was demonstrated that the support of parents and the coach was most significant. Parental support was shown as highest at the start of playing tennis, however, it was absent in the critical parts of their careers. The lack of parental support is especially evident at the end of competing at the junior level. Support from the coach was most manifested at the beginning of the collaboration, while the participants critically portrayed the absence and insufficient presence of the coach in important competitions.

Some of the participants consider that their parents' engagement should have been more intensive, as well as that they should have been more stimulating:

I wish they had put more pressure on me so to say. It wouldn't have hurt to be under more pressure by them, I wanted that, even today when I do something I like feeling pressured.

It would have been better if they had been stricter, perhaps putting more pressure on me to direct me only towards tennis.

The participants estimated that parental participation in the overall sports development is very important, while the person that they typically said had the most influence on their sports development was their father. One of the participants stated the following:

I was closest to my father, ever since I was little; ever since I was born I always chased a ball around the field with him. Since I was two years old, he took me to tennis, we were strongly connected during my whole life, whatever I was doing, I was doing it with him.

They also put special emphasis on the support of other family members, which was evidently very important as well in their sports development. In this respect, the participants especially pointed out their brothers and sisters as playing a significant role in their development:

When I would finish a match, I could call my brother and talk with him over the phone, and he would give me some advice. I think that this type of support and environment is very important.

My sister was very important to me, especially because she trained tennis before I did. Thanks to her, it was easier for me to go through my experience.

The participants all agreed that there had been differences in opinions, as well as conflicts with their parents. Most often the conflict occurred with the father, primarily because he spent most time with them. They considered such behaviour as within normal limits and that they had no significant implications on their development:

We would come into conflict because that type of relationship father/coach is neither easy nor simple.

My father was always the person to whom I could say many things, and someone at who I could throw all my rage.

There were also certain gaps during which it was necessary to create a positive environment that is considered as an important factor for positive results, and the above-mentioned situations were attributed to the fact that at a certain point in their careers they did not have a coach or he was not with them at the tournaments:

When you are in training or at a match, when you have someone to look at and signal to, this means very much to you, it means you are not alone.

This was the main thing for me that I missed - to have someone to guide me in such a way, because without that it simply didn't work, for sure.

The experiences of the participants clearly show that in this respect they all expected stronger support from their parents and a greater level of motivation and professionalism from their coach. The participants all stated that they had the required support at the beginning of their careers, however, they also lacked such support from their parents and coach in terms of making proper and timely decisions during the transition from junior to senior level tennis in the sense of preparing and directing them towards new challenges that were at that time completely unknown to them. When asked about the key moment in the development into a successful player, one of the participants stated as follows:

Well, I think it was at the end of junior level competitions and on the transition into senior tennis.

They expected more engagement from their parents at that point in accordance with the requirements of professional level tennis. Everything being unfamiliar and a lack of aspiration towards achieving success were the greatest obstacles:

As we started into this level of tennis, no one knew what that was, none of us. My mother was never into sports, while my father played some football, but nothing major. They were engaged with advancing in their business, my mother was an architect, whereas my father was in construction. I wanted to play tennis, but I did not have the proper guidance, I did not know what that really was, and no one explained it to me properly.

It is interesting that they all had an upward trajectory in their careers and achieved good results in younger categories, up until one moment in their careers that they consider to be crucial for them. They are convinced that the parents should have had a key role during the mentioned transitional phase:

Already at the age of twelve, I should have generally made a certain turn in my career, whether it was the location where I would be living and training, or a new coach. My parents should have recognized that, but in my case, no one realized that.

In addition, all the participants emphasized the fact that the coaches who worked with them had not been experienced enough to guide them at the higher level of competition. Although their parents' ambitions were great, they were also limited by their lack of knowledge, so the participants think that the coaches should have taken a more prominent role and responsibility:

If at that moment I had a coach who went through that entire situation, he would have said: "Never mind, we did not succeed this time, we must go on and work harder and develop further".

As the requirements of a sports lifestyle call for extreme dedication, the participants point out that the support from their friends and at school are essential for a successful and sustainable sports career. This also includes support from friends at school:

I always had three or four friends from my elementary school and they were always very supportive. They were really the best and we are until this day the best of friends.

In a similar manner, another participant also explained the way in which the circumstances that limited his time for being with friends were actually a positive developmental experience:

I missed a lot of classes at school, and my friends from school treated me as their friend whenever we would see each other, as if I had not missed anything, as if all was completely normal. This really helped me 'charge my batteries', and that type of recharging is always needed by everyone.

None of the participants denied the importance of school, however, they also did not consider it as particularly relevant for their overall sports development. As a result of such an approach, school did not seem to them as one of the factors for their success or failure. Mostly all the participants completed their secondary education through correspondence schooling programmes.

Traumatic experiences and negative life events (injuries and financial resources)

Upon analysis of transcripts, we identified several occurrences that were connected with negative life events and traumatic experiences that the participants stated as key moments in their tennis careers. Injuries were considered as a constituent part of tennis, however, one that also neg-

actively affected them and, quite often also slowed down their further progress. Reactions of the participants to their injuries were different. For example, one of the participants described his experience after an injury as follows:

I felt frustrated after the injury, it was terrible. My opponents were making good progress, while I lost a whole year; it was as if I was lost.

Furthermore, a considerably negative experience was the divorce of their parents. For most of them, that was a really traumatic experience, and they attempted to direct their focus towards training and competitions:

Due to that entire situation, I somehow actually found strength in my love for tennis. I think that it helped me to direct all my strength and energy into tennis and work even harder.

Leaving the parental home (e.g. going to tennis camps) and inappropriate communication and punishments were, likewise, another negative experience that resulted with unease for most of the participants:

When I left home for bigger cities as a child, I felt unease or perhaps less confident because I felt comfortable in my smaller environment.

My dad used to hit me on the tennis court and verbally abuse me in various ways when I was bad as a child, especially when I did not performed well on the tennis court.

Finally, financial resources were considered as one of the most relevant factors for success or failure in tennis. This also showed to be the main reason for ending their careers very early. They often describe the mentioned situation as a constant 'battle' to find financial means for travelling and coaches.

I believe that I was not close to a huge success solely due to the lack of financial resources, and I think that this is a huge factor to be able to succeed without it.

Well, there was never enough financial means, but we were lucky that my ancestors had bought some land so we had that. From my father's job nothing much, and my mother worked as an accountant in a state firm, however, that would not have been enough. It is impossible to finance playing tennis in cases where parents have ordinary jobs. I couldn't have done it then when it was much easier, let alone today, it would never cross my mind.

I regret that I was not able to pursue it a little longer, but I was not financially able to continue. There is no sense in regretting it all when I couldn't keep up financially. Unfortunately, this is the main problem in tennis.

Discussion

In the present study, we investigated the influences of different factors – sport specialization, the role of coaches and significant others in sports development and incidence

and types of trauma – on performance level among a sample of participants with world/European youth/junior achievements, but no performances at this level as seniors. The data obtained indicate several factors that negatively affect the successful development of young and talented tennis players, such as premature specialization, insufficient commitment to the training process, lack of adequate support by the parents and coach, failure to make proper and timely decisions on one's own sports development, injuries and insufficient financial means.

Hecimovich describes specialization as a complex process that should not take place until a general consensus is established on all advantages and disadvantages, whereas children should be encouraged to develop skills required for many sports before introducing specialization⁸. An early beginning of a narrow specialization should not take place prematurely in order to prevent the potential risk of training saturation and occurrence of injuries, which often leads to quitting tennis, as opposed to a tendency of aspiring towards high-level professional results. In a research conducted by Côté, it is pointed out that early sport specialization in children is not crucial for achieving top-level sports results in the future²³. Another potential disadvantage of premature specialization is the fact that young children remain deprived of participating in a diverse year-round sports activity, which could lead to a loss in the development of life-long sport skills⁷. Top-level athletes specialize later than less successful athletes²⁴. A study conducted by Bell et al. indicated that athletes with early specialization had almost twice the probability of injuries resulting from excessive trainings when compared to athletes who had later specialization²⁵. Recently, research has shown an increasing interest in the long-term development of young athletes^{26,27}. Enhancing the fitness abilities of youth throughout childhood to maximize athletic performance at an adult age is not a new approach, as evidenced by earlier youth-oriented training programs²⁸. The long-term athlete development (LTAD) model offers a more strategic approach to the athletic development of youth. The LTAD model suggests that there exist critical "windows of opportunity" during the developmental stage, whereby young people are more sensitive to training-induced adaptation²⁷. The model also states that failure to use these windows will result in the limitation of future athletic potential²⁷. This is particularly important for young tennis players' development as their early and middle years (i.e., sampling and specializing years) are characterized with intensive work periods.

It can be noticed from the results of our research that the participants had different levels of dedication towards the training process, and that it was often inconsistent in their path to realizing the potential they felt to possess. Likewise, it is demonstrated that their dedication and motivation were more extrinsic in nature, as well as that they depended on their surroundings and externally set challenges, and less on an intrinsic predetermination of what they want to become. In their interviews, it can also be noticed that they very often relied on others and their assistance, instead of taking responsibility for their level of

dedication to training. It could be argued that for a high level of dedication towards the training process, besides a deeply internal decision of the player himself, it is also necessary to set adequate and quality challenges for the players. Surely, overall support from the environment is also needed, in addition to implementing timely and proper decisions regarding the future development of one's career. The participants believe that support from parents and the coach are crucial in the period of transition between junior and senior level tennis, which is often lacking right at that moment in the form that the participants consider it to be necessary^{8,9,29}. The participants most often stated that their parents did not possess the required knowledge on what should be done in the mentioned transition period, as they were already exhausted from providing their support, while their coaches often did not possess the required experience and competence for making such a transition. Previous investigations showed that parents appeared to fulfill the most significant roles in terms of providing emotional and tangible support and the role of the coach was focused on providing performance advice^{30,31}.

Support from school, brothers, sisters and friends was estimated as significant, and they all stated that school was a very important element for their overall development. This is in keeping with some previous research that indicates the support of various social factors as necessary for achieving top-level results, including support from the family, coach, teammates and support staff members²⁶.

Sarkar et al.¹² concluded in their research that negative life events and traumatic experiences positively affected the overall tennis development of talented individuals, as well as that they benefited from the above-mentioned experiences in the accomplishment of their goals. Our research of less successful athletes determined that negative life events and traumatic experiences negatively affected the realization of their potential. Thus, such experiences can sometimes have a positive effect, whereas in other situations they can have a negative influence on the success of one's career. During this research, several events were identified as negative experiences, and most often they were the following: injuries, parents' divorce, changing the place of residence and training, verbal and physical abuse as well as lack of financial means. Upon analysing the interviews one can notice a relatively calm and harmonious beginning of the career, up until the moment of transition from junior to senior level tennis. In that period, various problems occur, most often injuries. The mentioned injuries are perceived as extremely negative experiences. Collins et al.¹⁰ also concluded that athletes consider injuries as negative life events, i.e. traumas. Although it was noticeable that the participants were highly aware that injuries are a constituent part of the sport that they should deal with, their conclusion was that such periods caused them to lose valuable time. Their injuries often did not serve as motivation for more focused training approach. It resulted in their attention being stuck on the fact they had lost time that could not be compensated for. Contrary to the above-mentioned research by Collins et al.¹⁰, it was determined that negative life events and trau-

matic experiences, especially over a longer period of time, had a positive influence on the careers of successful athletes. In some of the participants, their parents' divorce definitely showed to be a deeply negative experience. It is interesting that in cases of such highly intensive experiences the participants then focused more on their tennis, as it provided to them a feeling of satisfaction, and in some way, distance from their family situation. Changing the place of residence, training and competing can certainly be considered as negative life events, and as such were the above-mentioned characterized by some of our participants. Considering that tennis is a sport that includes a lot of travelling due to competing in tournaments, trainings take place in various places and locations, as well as climate zones, so it is not to be expected to always have identical conditions (as when in your place of residence). Tennis players should be accustomed from an early age to adapt to different conditions for the simple reason that tennis is a kind of sport that requires a lot of travelling, as well as staying, training and competing in different places and variable conditions. The financial complexity of playing tennis is remarkable when considering what type of team a player who is developing and striving towards top-level results must have around him. In addition to the above-mentioned, there are also substantial travelling and accommodation costs of tournaments, which constantly take place throughout the entire season in various destinations. The participants consider the lack of financial resources as one of the most typical reasons for ending an active career. They point out that their parents could only keep up with them until a certain point in their career, while after that point, they describe the subsequent period as a constant 'battle' for finding the much-needed financial resources.

Conclusions

In order to provide a more adequate support for a better development of young tennis players' careers, parents and coaches must be careful with stimulating early specialization. First of all, a premature specialization increases the risk of players becoming saturated with the chosen sport and the undergone experiences. Premature specialization also leads to increasing the risk of injuries in an extremely important period of their junior level career, and ultimately it also often results in early quitting from tennis. Experiences related to support from the parents, coach and friends are very important and indispensable in the overall process of sports and personal growing up, while particular attention should be given by the coaches and parents to the period in the career when the players transition from junior to senior level tennis. As one of the participants described: "Involvement in elite tennis is a team effort whereby players, parents, and coaches fulfill specific roles". The conclusion can be made that the participants had different levels of dedication to the training process. Their dedication level depended on the adequacy of the presented goals and challenges that were set in front of the athletes, however also on their personal character. Namely, some of the participants experienced a greater

sense of satisfaction when performing in team sports or playing in doubles, thus feeling more to be a team player. Negative life events and traumatic experiences, such as injuries, parental divorce, changing the place of residence and training, lack of financial means, did not have a positive effect on the participants and did not contribute to the development of their careers. Quite the contrary, a series of negative experiences led them towards ending their careers. It would be interesting to interview more successful male and female players with regard to the following segments of the above-mentioned topics – (early

specialization, social support, negative life events and traumatic experiences – and to conduct a comparative analysis with less successful male and female players. Such research would provide insight into the experiences of more successful players and the ways in which they experienced the events on their path towards successful careers. The mentioned comparative analysis could bring valuable data for parents and coaches on what to do in order to direct the successfulness of a tennis player's career as best possible.

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TALENT U SPORTU NIKADA NIJE DOVOLJAN: PRETHODNA ANALIZA KVALITATIVNIH PODATAKA

SAŽETAK

Sportski razvoj mladih i talentiranih sportaša vrlo je dinamičan proces u kojem je prisutan čitav niz izazova i prepreka. Cilj je ovoga istraživanja kvalitativna analiza iskustava tenisača niže razine seniorske uspješnosti. Nastojali su se identificirati faktori koji su onemogućili seniorsku uspješnost kod tenisača koji su postizali izvrsne juniorske rezultate. Poseban naglasak stavljen je na tri domene koje su u dosadašnjim istraživanjima prikazane kao ključne za uspješnu karijeru sportaša (specijalizacija u odabranome sportu, utjecaj okoline u sportskom razvoju i negativni životni događaji/okolnosti). Provedena je serija polistrukturiranih intervjua sa tenisačima seniorske kategorije (N = 10). Podatci ukazuju na nekoliko faktora koji negativno utječu na uspješan razvoj mladih i talentiranih tenisača, a to su: prerana specijalizacija, nedovoljna posvećenost trenažnom procesu, nedostatak dovoljne podrške roditelja i trenera, ne donošenje pravilnih i pravodobnih odluka glede vlastitog sportskog razvoja, ozljede i nedostatak adekvatnih financija. Identificiranje ključnih faktora u sportskom razvoju mladih sportaša može biti od ključne važnosti pri kvalitetnom vođenju i usmjerenju karijera talentiranih sportaša.

