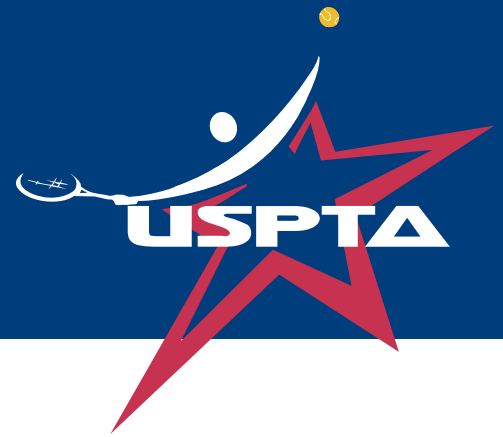


The parent-coach



Parent-coaches and their roles in tennis development

by **Tim Heckler, USPTA CEO**

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Parents coach their children in all of life's lessons from using proper etiquette and getting the right nutrition to completing school work and interacting socially. For this reason, parental involvement and support is necessary for a child's success in tennis or any endeavor in life. Simply said, parents are always, to some degree, a parent-coach in the life of the vast majority of successful young tennis players.

While the qualifications of a USPTA-certified teaching professional are indispensable for developing a child's six major components of learning – the physical, technical, tactical, strategic, mental and environmental – a parent generally plays an equally important role in a child's lifetime tennis journey. If we follow the premise that the six critical components of learning include 43 subcomponents (analyzed later in this chapter), it is indisputable that it takes an involved parent for every child to gain the maximum learning and playing experience from tennis.

This insert launches a series of articles that can be useful to both the coach and the

parent, also taking into account that some professional coaches are also parents who take on both jobs. It's important that this person understand that any successful athlete must navigate two major pathways: **Learning** and **Playing**.

First, the Learning Pathway of tennis or any sport requires the successful integration of six general components of learning. Secondly, the skills acquired in the Learning Pathway must be used to play the sport and transition to the various competitive levels within the Playing Pathway, regardless of how far the player progresses. The Playing Pathway has historically been one of the most difficult of

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all topics for most parent-coaches to understand. ***Outlined in this insert are the nine distinct levels of competition, from the beginning stages of Little Tennis all the way up to the ATP and WTA professional tours and everything in between.***

It's important for all parent-coaches to understand the importance of the Learning and Playing pathways and how they can influence the overall development of their child as a tennis player. The degree to which each parent chooses to be involved in a player's life is unique to their own parent-child relationship and level of tennis knowledge.

Some parents simply drive their child to and from practice. At the other end of the spectrum are those who serve as the primary coach, completely involved in every aspect of their child's athletic life. It all depends on the interest and expertise of the individual. Either way, the parent plays a vital role.



With a beginner, the parent needs a basic understanding of how to help the child progress. As the player becomes more competitive, a parent must learn more about meeting the child's growing needs.

One of the most important things a parent-coach should know is that helping a player become proficient at tennis requires a great amount of time, dedication and persistence. It is said to take 10,000 hours of serious practice and playing to reach the professional level of any sport or artistic endeavor, whether it's becoming a pro tennis player or a concert violinist.

Therefore, it is important for parents to decide how far they want their child to go in the game. It is even more important for the parent (if he or she is not a teaching professional), to find the right teaching pro to guide both the player and parent in this quest.

In this insert, we have recognized distinct levels of commitment that will not only explain potential achievements for parent-coach and child but also how to attain these goals.

The five levels of parent-coach

There are five distinct levels of the parent-coach, ranging from the least involved to most involved. These are outlined below to help parents assess where they are and to make the transition toward their desired level, based on their tennis knowledge, commitment and goals for their child.

Level 5 (least involved)

- *Hands-off Parent-Coach:* This parent does not know much about the game of tennis and places everything in the teaching professional's hands. He or she offers no technical advice but remains a vital part of the child's support system. Typically, the responsibilities of the hands-off parent-coach are to transport the child to practice and/or tournaments and take care of the

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