

# A Parents' Guide to Tennis Coaching & Competition

By Head Coach, Sarah Coverdale

Belbroughton  
Tennis Club



## Introduction to this Guide

### What is my role as a tennis parent?

- Encourage, encourage, and more encouragement!
- Research has shown that the support and interest of the parents is crucial to the child's long term participation in tennis. However, it has also shown us that much of the physical and emotional stress affecting junior players is caused by their parents.
- Parents have a very important role to play in their child's tennis activity, whatever their level of participation.
- Hopefully this guide will help you to understand your role, and perform better within the highly complex, and sometimes confusing world of competitive junior tennis.

### My coaching philosophies (Sarah):

- My measure of success is not whether I coach a player who ends up turning professional, or winning Wimbledon, or representing Belbroughton Tennis Club or their school. Of course that would be nice! But actually my measure of success is whether players that I teach are building a love of the sport, and are still playing, and loving the sport in 10 or 20 or 50 years.
- Children should be exposed to lots of different activities and sports. Encourage them to find something that they love.
- If your child has ambitions to be a professional sports person, encourage them to play as many different sports as they can. Each different sport will provide them with a different skill set, challenge them in different ways, and will help their bodies to grow evenly. Specialisation in just one sport at too young an age can lead to an imbalanced body that is very strong in some places, but also very weak in other areas and this can lead to injuries.
- 'Tell me, and I forget. Teach me, and I remember. Involve me, and I learn'. Benjamin Franklin.
- 'A great coach will tell you things you may not like hearing. A great coach will make you do things you may not like doing. A great coach will help you achieve things you may not think possible'.
- 'A word of encouragement during a failure is worth more than an hour of praise after success'.

### Why should my child compete at tennis?

- Tennis is primarily an individual sport, and even though that makes it extremely challenging for junior players, it also means playing competitive tennis can help your child learn invaluable life skills, such as self-discipline, self-reliance and respect for others.
- Individual sports can teach children to work hard, to learn to manage stress, to perform under pressure, and to learn to try and keep emotional control in a very challenging situation.

### Parents and tennis as a sport

ref: International Tennis Federation

- Focus mostly on performance and process, instead of focusing only on results or outcomes.
- Reward effort and hard work ahead of success. AVOID rewarding only results.
- Promote the perspective that tennis is only a sport, emphasising its value as a preparation for life. AVOID making tennis bigger than life by for instance, placing more importance on tennis than school work.

- As a tennis parent, try to understand and have empathy with the emotional pressures and the complexity of the sport itself. AVOID underestimating the stresses of an individual sport like tennis.
- Give your children tasks and responsibilities which will in time, build self-confidence and independence. AVOID making them overly dependent on you.
- Ensure that the tennis competitive experience is a positive one, principally from the perspective of developing the person. Emphasise the important elements of sportsmanship, ethics, personal development, responsibility and a positive attitude towards others and by doing so, share with your child a healthy interest in a great sport. AVOID allowing training and competition to become a negative experience for your child.
- Realise that children not only have the right to participate in tennis but also, to choose NOT to participate.
- Let your child know you care and are there if they need you to help them. AVOID becoming over involved in your child's tennis.
- Be prepared to listen and learn. AVOID thinking that you know everything about tennis.
- Be supportive (financially and otherwise) reinforcing that you are happy to support your child's involvement in tennis. AVOID fostering guilt by making your child think that they owe you for the time, money and sacrifices you have made.
- Make your child feel valuable and reinforce self-esteem, especially when they lose.
- Emphasise that 'win, or lose, I love you just the same'.
- The only expectation that you should have from your child's involvement in tennis is that playing tennis will help your child to become a better person and athlete. Anything else will be a bonus. AVOID assuming or expecting that you child will become a professional tennis player.
- Compare your child's progress with their own abilities/goals. AVOID comparing your child's progress with that of other children.
- Encourage your child to play other sports, to build relationships and to participate in other activities. AVOID forcing your child to focus entirely on tennis.

### **How to deal with losses**

- Tennis is a sport where each point, each tiebreak, each set, and each match is either won or lost, that cannot be ignored.
- Junior tennis players need to learn to deal with losing - it is a part and parcel of tennis.
- If your child gets upset or loses emotional control after or even during a loss or match, don't rush straight up to them. See if they can calm themselves down, sometimes just a few minutes of space away from everyone can do this, and help them process their own emotions.
- If your child comes to you for support, try to help them understand that losing a tennis match is not the end of the world, and does not make them a bad person.
- Commend effort and attitude, and give positive feedback first.
- Talk about the match, but only if your child wants to.
- Help them to recognise that all tennis players lose matches. No one wins every match they play, in fact quite the opposite. Plenty of professional tennis players have successful careers, but actually at the end of their career have more losses than wins.
- You need to help your child separate themselves from the outcome of their performance, and help them to let go of the notion that making mistakes and failing are two of the worst things that they could possibly ever do. This means that both verbally and non-verbally you have to consistently give them the message that they are not their performances.

- Be disappointed WITH them, not disappointed IN them. When they fail, empathise with their disappointment, and reflect back to them that you understand how their disappointment feels e.g. 'I can imagine how tough it feels to lose such a close match, I know you're disappointed, it is tough to lose and is not a nice feeling.' But again, emphasise that the result makes no difference to how you feel about them. It is their disappointment, not your disappointment. Remember, they are not performing in their sport for you. The sport belongs to them, they should be performing for themselves!
- Roger Federer has won 55% of his career points. Andy Murray has won 54% of his career points. The difference between them is 15 grand slam titles. Try to get your child to see that every point is worth fighting for as it could be just one point that makes the difference.
- Losing is tough. Losing with grit and grace is even tougher. Congratulate them if they manage it, and tell them how proud you are of them for that.
- Never miss an opportunity to praise. During the match, store away good things in your head so you are able to help them recall things they did well in the match.

### **What Not To Say! - A Parent's Guide to Tennis Competition**

Ref: Amanda Twigg

Language used around junior tennis players when they are competing or in the days leading up to it can affect a player's approach to competition.

As tennis is an individual sport, the role of a tennis parent is critical, and in the best cases parents can give players self-confidence and enjoyment of the sport which they can carry all the way through a match or tournament, or in the worst cases can make junior players want to quit competing or playing all together!

This is hopefully a useful tool to help parents recognise some phrases which can be particularly unhelpful!

#### **1. Statements which predict failure.**

e.g. My son has a terrible draw against the number 1 seed, my daughter has never beaten this player.

These phrases are preparation for failure. You may think it makes defeat easier to deal with when it happens, but this type of language allows players to accept defeat before they even step on to court.

#### **2) Statements which elevate the player.**

e.g. My daughter should be in a higher-level tournament, my son is the best in the draw, all of the opponents are rubbish, you will beat this player easily, you are much better than them.

Rather than giving confidence, these expressions place a burden of expectation on players. These expectations may, or may not be justified, but it leaves players with the opportunity only to meet expectations, or to fail. There is not a chance to feel good about success because it was supposed to happen, and fear of failure can make them tense up.

#### **3) Statements which are excuses.**

e.g. He has been ill, she didn't sleep well, he isn't playing well, she has been training on a different ball colour.

These are unconscious defence against possible failure. Players who hear these excuses are more likely to give in during a match, and may well start to offer excuses themselves, like developing a limp, or a stomach ache during play.

#### **4) Statements designed to protect the player.**

e.g. Just go and enjoy it, it's the taking part that counts.

If a player is naturally competitive, they won't comfortably adopt the strategy, and if they do, it will make them disengage from the competitive element. In tennis, a player wins or loses every point. That can't be ignored.

- Many of these phrases stem from parental competition stress, which is entirely natural but must be dealt with. Once parents become skilled at recognising and dealing with their own reactions, useful language will be easier to find.
- The aim is to develop players who thrive in a competitive environment and compete to the best of their ability, whatever the situation is, and whoever the opponent is.
- They need to learn the skill of playing in the present. Therefore, discussions in the days leading up to a competition should concern matters which are of an immediate concern, and which you do have control over e.g. eating and drinking well, preparing equipment, getting a good night's sleep.
- There are no absolutes, and every player will have different needs, but the outlined strategy above should help in most cases.

#### **Good things to talk about after a match ( in Sarah's opinion!)**

But only when the player is ready and wants to discuss the match. If they don't want to talk about it, don't force them!

1. What was your best point, can you describe it?
2. Were there any rules or scoring problems that we can find out the answer to before your next match.
3. Can you name 5 things you did well in the match? (Could be a particular shot, or a tactic, or calling the score out between points, line calling etc). Encourage them to be able to come up with 5, even if they lost the match.
4. Did you recognise if the opponent had a weaker side (forehand or backhand?). This type of question encourages them to start thinking tactically, and also can help players who get too obsessed with their own level of play, without recognising good play from their opponent.

#### **Alex Corretja**

Highly successful Spanish tennis player! Says his parents always asked him the same 4 questions in this order after every match:

1. Did you behave?
2. Did you enjoy the match?
3. Did you fight hard for every single point?
4. Did you win?

He says the fact that winning or losing was not the most important thing in his parents' eyes really helped him learn to love competing.

## **10 Commandments for Tennis Parents**

by Peter Farrell - Leinster Tennis

1. You shall watch your child's match from wherever they feel most comfortable having you - near the court, in the clubhouse, or 10 miles away.
2. You shall not speak or signal to your child during the match, quite simply, this is against the rules.
3. You shall remain calm during play, whether 'your side' is 5-0 up, or 0-5 down.
4. You shall not rush to your child at the end of the match to give them your in-depth analysis. Win or lose, most players need time to themselves after competing.
5. You shall judge a match based on your child's performance, effort and sportsmanship. Not on whether they won or lost.
6. You shall not force your child to practice when they really do not want to - unless your aim is to turn them off tennis.
7. You shall encourage your child to be as independent as possible in organising their own tennis schedule. Success at tennis requires independent thought and action.
8. You shall not go to every single lesson, practise session or match. Your child needs to get used to playing without you around.
9. You shall allow your child and their coach to decide what to do during lessons. Your influence in this specialist area should be minimal.
10. You shall be a loved, respected and welcomed tennis parent, should you obey the first 9 commandments!

### **How we, as their coaches, are trying to help them at Belbroughton:**

- Incorporating matchplay and points into their lessons and/or providing them with competitive opportunities both at our club, and other clubs.
- Encouraging and valuing effort, attitude and good sportsmanship over everything else.
- Recognising that if we can help kids feel good about themselves, we are halfway to whatever it is we are trying to help them learn.
- Trying to incorporate the '5 pillars to a successful tennis program'
  1. Instruction
  2. Competition
  3. Practise
  4. Social/belonging
  5. Progression
- Providing individual lessons - please ask us about these if you are interested for your child. They can be very beneficial, even just 1 or 2 here and there can make a big difference. They can be shared with another player.

### **How parents can help us**

- Regular communication - if your child is coming back from lessons or competitions and seems unhappy or unmotivated, the earlier you tell us, the easier it is to try and recognise and address the problem before it gets too big.
- If you want to chat with either of us, it is best to ask us to schedule a time (even if it's just 5 minutes after a lesson, or a phone call). Most of the time we have lessons in a row, so if a parents asks us questions, or ask for feedback or a chat, with the best intentions possible, we won't be able to do our best if we are worried about our next lesson not starting on time.

- Provide us with feedback from matches or tournaments. But if possible it is best to do this out of ear shot of your child. You may or may not be able to give us technical feedback, but we are also extremely interested in how your child got on with dealing with tough situations, any scoring problems that arose, any thoughts after the match that your child gave you.
- If your child seems very highly motivated to do a lot of tennis, let us know! We can help find them another child who also wants to come down and practise, or we can even find them a role within our coaching programme, maybe doing some hitting with a younger player.
- If you think we have anything missing from our programme, or have any new ideas of things we could incorporate please let us know.
- If any of you would like to volunteer to help at any events we run, with scoring or umpiring please let us know. We can help you if you don't know the scoring systems, and very much appreciate any help we can get!

## **12,14,16,18&Under Events Jan - March 2016**

### **Recommended for Belbroughton Players**

Date	Age Group	Grade	Event	Closing Date
17/1/2016	14u Boys	5	Tipton	5/1
17/1/2016	12,14,16u Girls		Redditch	8/1
24/1/2016	14u	6	Tipton Matchplay	12/1
31/1/2016	14u	5	Redditch	24/1
6/2/2016	14u	5	Tipton	26/1
7/2/2016	12u	5	Tipton	26/1
7/2/2016	12u	5	Alcester INSPIRE2COACH	29/1
13/2/2016 - 19/2/2016	12,14,16,18U	4	Solihull Arden	4/2
14/2/2016 - 17/2/2016	12,14,16,18u	4	Beechwood INSPIRE2COACH	31/1
14/2/2016 - 19/2/2016	12,14,16,18U	3	Tipton	30/1
15/2/2016	14u Boys	5	Tudor Grange	8/2
17/2/2016	12,16u	5	Redditch	10/2
18/2/2016	14,18u	5	Redditch	10/2
21/2/2016	14u	6	Tipton Matchplay	9/2
5/3/2016 - 6/3/2016	12u Boys	3	DL Dudley	23/2
5/3/2016 - 6/3/2016	16u Boys	3	Tipton	23/2
5/3/2016 - 6/3/2016	14u Boys	4	Sutton Coldfield	23/2
6/3/2016	14u	4	Redditch	23/2
6/3/2016	12u	5	Tipton	23/2
6/3/2016	14u	5	Wolverhampton	2/3
6/3/2016	18u	4	Sutton Coldfield	23/2
12/3/2016 -	12,14,16u	5	War Memorial Park	27/2

13/3/2016			INSPIRE2COACH	
13/3/2016	14u	6	Tipton Matchplay	1/3
13/3/2016	12u	5	Tudor Grange	6/3
13/3/2016	12,14,16u	5	Wolverhampton	9/3
19/3/2016 - 20/3/2016	18u Boys	3	DL Dudley	8/3
19/3/2016 - 20/3/2016	18u Boys	3	Tipton	8/3
19/3/2016	18u Boys	5	Solihull Arden	12/3
19/3/2016	16u	5	Sutton Coldfield	14/3
20/3/2016	16u Boys Doubles	4	Kempsey	8/3
23/3/2016	12,16u	5	Redditch	16/3
24/3/2016	14,18u	5	Redditch	17/3
29/3/2016 - 2/4/2016	12,14,16,18	3	Wolverhampton	22/3
29/3/2016 - 2/4/2016	12,14,16,18	4	Redditch	22/3
31/3/2016	12,14,16,18 Boys	6	Redditch Matchplay	24/3

## **Mini Tennis Events Jan - March 2016**

### **Recommended for Belbroughton players**

Date	Age Group	Grade	Event	Closing Date
17/1/2016	RED	6	DL Worcester	12/1
17/1/2016	RED/ORANGE/GREEN	5	Wolverhampton	6/1
24/1/2016	ORANGE	4	Wolverhampton	12/1
31/1/2016	ORANGE	5	Tipton	19/1
31/1/2016	GREEN	5	Tudor Grange	23/1
7/2/2016	RED	5	Tipton	26/1
7/2/2016	GREEN/12&U	5	Alcester INSPIRE2COACH	29/1
14/2/2016- 17/2/2016	RED/ORANGE/GREEN	4	Beechwood INSPIRE2COACH	31/1
14/2/2016 - 19/2/2016	RED/ORANGE/GREEN	3	Tipton	30/1
15/2/2016	RED/GREEN	5	Redditch	8/2
16/2/2016	ORANGE	5	Redditch	8/2
21/2/2016	ORANGE	6	DL Worcester	16/2
27/2/2016	RED	5	Uni of Warwick INSPIRE2COACH	13/2
28/2/2016	RED/ORANGE/GREEN	6	BELBROUGHTON INSPIRE2COACH	19/2
5/3/2016	RED OUTDOOR	6	Henley	29/2
12/3/2016	ORANGE	5	Tipton	1/3
12/3/2016	RED	5	Uni of Warwick INSPIRE2COACH	27/2
12/3/2016	RED	6	DL Worcester	8/3
12/3/2016	GREEN	5	Sutton Coldfield	9/3
13/3/2016	RED	5	Tipton	1/3
13/3/2016	RED/ORANGE/GREEN	6	Evesham INSPIRE2COACH	4/3

19/3/2016 - 20/3/2016	RED/ORANGE/GREEN	6	War Memorial Park INSPIRE2COACH	5/3
19/3/2016	RED	5	Sutton Coldfield	14/3
21/3/2016	RED/GREEN	5	Redditch	14/3
22/3/2016	ORANGE	5	Redditch	14/3
27/3/2016 - 2/4/2016	RED/ORANGE/GREEN	3	Wolverhampton	13/3
29/3/2016 - 2/4/2016	RED/ORANGE/GREEN	4	Redditch	22/3