

myths of tennis coaching

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Introduction

In previous issues of ITF Coaching & Sport Science Review (12 and 13) we have included contributions on what makes someone a good tennis coach. This may seem self-explanatory as we can all identify good and bad coaches, yet is it really *that obvious*?

In tennis coaching, as in many other things in life, there are myths. These myths are statements or beliefs usually of nameless origin, which tend to be naively received and accepted by everybody. Furthermore, these myths are used to support existing practices that, in many cases, fail to evolve.

In this article we will summarise ten myths of tennis coaching. Through the myths, we can begin to understand the criteria that define good tennis coaches no matter the level at which they work.

Myth 1: The good coach is born. Average coaches are made.

Truth 1: Good and average coaches are mostly made.

Research has shown that the most important characteristics of the good tennis coach: leadership skills, empathy, communication abilities, people skills, etc. are primarily learnt.

Some people however, seem to have been born with an innate ability to speak, lead or teach. In these cases,

they also have to improve and learn new techniques and methods.

Myth 2: The coach should be a winner because winning is everything in tennis and in life.

Truth 2: The coach should be a winner but winning, especially at the junior level, is not everything.

Helping players win matches through improved performances, coaching them tactically, technically, physically and mentally, and teaching them to respect the rules of the game are crucial aspects of the coach's role. However, what's most relevant is the overall development of the player as a human being and as an athlete.

Coaches should not forget that the person comes first, the player second and winning, may be third. Tennis is an excellent vehicle for training youngsters to be successful in life – coaches should endeavour to use it as such.

Myth 3: If you played tennis at good level, you're obviously qualified to coach tennis. Truth 3: You are qualified to coach tennis only after being qualified to do so!

It is a common belief that if you've played tennis at good level, you're qualified to coach it. Obviously, this is not true. If you personally enjoy

reading novels, this does not mean that you are qualified to be a novelist! Playing the game just implies that you know how to do it, not that you are good at teaching how to do it.

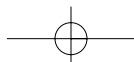
You are qualified to coach tennis only when you have learned, and know how to apply the principles of coaching. The best way to do it is by participating in the applicable coaching courses of a relevant tennis organisation.

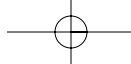
Myth 4: The better you played tennis, the more qualified you are to coach.

Truth 4: Playing ability and coaching skills are not necessarily related.

It is obvious that tennis coaches need the necessary playing skills to demonstrate and rally with their players. However, we all know good tennis players that are not good coaches. In some cases because they do not have the patience, the interest or the skills needed to be a good coach, or in others, simply because they have no real desire to be a coach! They are coaches just because they are or were good players.

A good coach will seek to become better "educated". It does not happen overnight. There are no shortcuts in coaches education. Good coaches





need to invest interest, time and money in themselves in order to reach their own coaching potential.

Myth 5: Effective and serious coaching is complex.

Truth 5: The obvious is the biggest secret. Keep it simple.

While seeking new information and learning opportunities are very important for any coach's development, complex coaching does not necessarily equate to effective coaching. It is not how sophisticated your coaching information is, but how well you use it and pass it on to your players.

Good coaches are those who use first hand information on sports science and technology, understand it and "translate" it in such a way that it is easily understood and applied by their players.

Myth 6: The more years of experience you have as a coach, the better you are at coaching.

Truth 6: Experience is not enough for good coaching.

Becoming a good tennis coach is not just about teaching lots of hours, seven days a week or one year after another. It is more than just having very good or a large number of players. Good coaching is an ongoing process where quality and not quantity is the key



ingredient. Experience (i.e. amount of coaching hours) can be meaningless if quality (effectiveness, high standards, cooperation) is non-existent.

Coaches should learn to improve in such a way that their experience will help them to be more knowledgeable and impart better coaching.

Myth 7: Coaching is just a profession.

Truth 7: Coaching is more than a profession.

Coaching is not a 9 to 5 job. Sometimes, it has no hours, no free weekends, no long holidays. Like the role played by doctors and teachers in our community, the role of the tennis coach also transcends just a profession. It is a lifestyle choice where you choose to have opportunities, daily and sometimes hourly, to impact upon a person's life.

Myth 8: Trained coaches are needed most of all with top players, rather than with beginners.

Truth 8: Coaches should be knowledgeable at all levels.

People tend to believe that coaches who work with the champions are more indispensable, important and knowledgeable than those working with beginner or intermediate players.

Many champions have recognised that the coaches they've had when they first started to play tennis were the most important ones of their careers. Good coaches at the beginner level are of paramount importance since they are the ones responsible for creating an enjoyable and expansive environment for players just starting out. They are the ones who can lay the foundation for future success in tennis and life.

Myth 9: A male coach is superior to a female coach.

Truth 9: Coaching skills aren't gender-related.

Good coaching has nothing to do with the gender of the person. There are good and bad male and female tennis coaches. However, female and male coaches do not coach the same. They may have different coaching characteristics, which are often defined by their gender. These characteristics, however, do not affect the quality of their coaching.

Myth 10: The best coach is a "command style" one.

Truth 10: The best coach is the one who mixes up coaching styles according to the situation and the players.

A "command style" coach can be a good coach. However, the best coach is the one who grows his own coaching styles/principles and along the way understands that players are different and will learn and process information in different ways. Often these coaches are referred to as cooperative style coaches.

Good coaches learn to analyse the situations and learn from their players' needs such that they are able to use the different coaching styles accordingly.

Conclusion

Being a good tennis coach is a thrilling challenge. If you want to meet it, it is important to combine the available sport science knowledge with an adequate playing level and the necessary communication and interpersonal skills. However, above all, your desire and interest to help others no matter their level of competence will be the determining factor, which will elevate you as a coach to the next level.

The primary job of a tennis coach is not solely to teach tennis, but to help their students to learn it by adapting all of the information available into applicable, practical principles that the players can use.

Good coaches are well-educated coaches, true professionals of tennis coaching. An understanding of the reasons behind these coaching myths and the encouragement of coaches to realise what it takes to be a good tennis coach will benefit not only the profession, but the players and the game in general, as well.

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