

Tennis Coaches Education: A Worldwide Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Coaches' education is considered fundamental to most national association tennis development programmes. With some of the most established tennis nations starting their coaches' education programmes (CEP's) in the early part of the 20th century, emphasis on coaching didactics is not new. Late in the 20th century however, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) - the sport's governing body - became progressively more involved in coaches' education the world over. The underlying intention was to help educate all

nations as to the importance of coaches' education and ultimately assist them develop their own CEP's (Miley, 2003).

Validating the status of coaches' education

In 2003 the ITF Coaches' Commission asked the ITF Development Department to survey the characteristics of the different CEP's worldwide. In doing so, the ITF formulated the following research goals:

- Collate and compare the characteristics

(pre-requisites, contents, contact hours, reference material, assessments...) of the CEP's of as many ITF member nations as possible.

- Produce a comparison chart to highlight the structure of the different CEP's worldwide (ITF, 2003).
- Use the information gathered as criteria to establish normative teaching loads and requisites between programmes to facilitate assimilation of coaching certification inter-country/association.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research consisted of two parts:

– Coaches' education programmes in the most developed tennis nations:

A group of experts comprised of the ITF Development Officers, Research Officers, other Development staff and members of the ITF Coaches' Commission formed the ITF Questionnaire on Coaches' Education (ITF, 2003b).

The group then decided that the questionnaire be sent to the world's top 25 tennis nations, as determined by the guidelines set for the ITF Marketing of the Game Summit. These nations were: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada,

Croatia, the Czech Republic, Egypt, France, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the USA.

– Coaches' education programmes in less developed nations:

Many of the less developed tennis nations have been exposed to the ITF CEP so it was decided that the ITF Development Officers would be in the best position to expand on the different CEP's in their region. These

experts were asked to classify the nations into four groups: 1. national associations that follow the ITF syllabi almost entirely, 2. national associations that follow the ITF syllabi combined with own programme, 3. national associations that have their own CEP, and 4. national associations that have no CEP in place.

RESULTS

With statistical analysis ongoing, the study's preliminary descriptive results are presented below.

A) Top tennis nations:

- Total number: Twenty two of the top 25 tennis nations (88%) completed and returned the questionnaires.
- Main features of their CEP's were:
 - Ownership: Top tennis nations have their own CEP's.
 - Delivery: Most national associations exhibit control over and run the CEP by themselves. Only a handful have outsourced coach education to a private or independent company (coaches' association, etc.).
 - Names of the courses:
 - Lower / introductory levels: Instructor, teacher, trainer, initiator, development, and volunteer.
 - Higher levels: Professor, advanced, elite, club pro, high level, and tournament coach.
 - Other: A, B, C, 1, 2, 3.
 - 54% have names, 27% have numbers (1,2,3), while 18% use letters (A,B,C).
 - Course structures: The number of certification courses/tiers varies from 1-7, with a mean of 3-4 levels.
 - Number of formal hours: There is considerable difference in the number of formal hours spent with a tutor present. Lower levels courses have as few as 6 tutor-

AVERAGE formal contact hours with tutor present				
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Total hrs (22)	2265	3419	3992	2926
Average (22)	102.9	155.5	199.6	365.8

Table 1. Formal contact hours with tutor present in courses of most developed tennis nations.

	<i>National Associations following the ITF syllabi almost entirely</i>	<i>National Associations following the ITF syllabi combined with own programme</i>	<i>National Associations with own coaches education programme</i>	<i>National Associations with no formal coaches education programme</i>	<i>Total</i>
North America	0	0	2	0	2
CA & Caribbean	19	3	3	6	31
South America	8	1	1	0	10
Europe	5	5	34	4	48
Africa	45	1	2	3	51
Asia	31	2	1	7	41
Pacific Oceania	0	0	2	14	16
TOTAL	108	12	45	34	199

Table 2. The coaches' education status of 199 nations affiliated to the ITF.

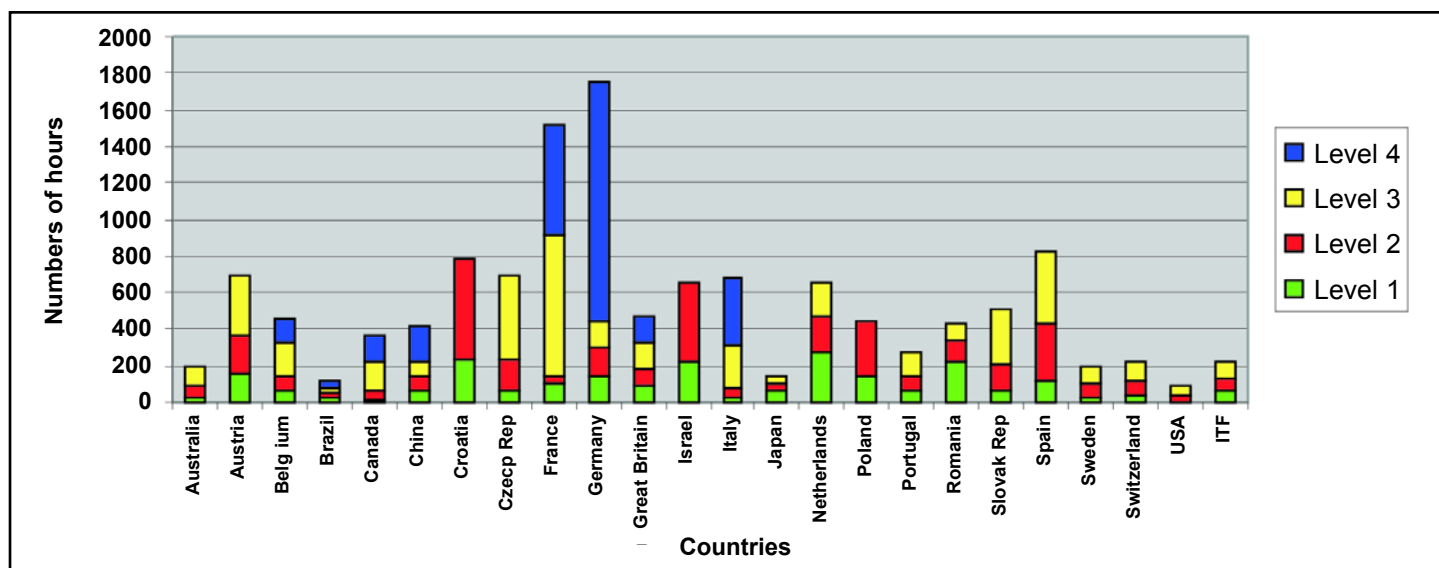


Figure 1. Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 contact hours (with tutor present) in courses of most developed tennis nations plus nations using the ITF syllabi.

coach contact hours and as many as 270. On the other hand, the higher levels of certification require coaches to complete anywhere from 700 to 1300 hours or even a University degree (four years). Table 1 shows the contact hours of these courses.

- Course hours: Most CEP's have fewer hours in the introductory levels than the higher levels. There are however, a few CEP's that have adopted the opposite structure. Figure 1 depicts the course hours in the different levels.
- Hours per subject: On court training is the subject that attracts the most number of hours in almost all coaches' courses. Again, while there is significant variation in the number of hours per subject between courses, information on the majority of the sport sciences, computing and even languages form part of the course content in most courses.
- Testing: All programmes include diverse theoretical and practical assessment procedures.
- Pre-requisites: Criteria that help govern course participation such as age, playing level, education, and minimum time between courses/levels are common to most CEP's.
- Other relevant information: In general, there are no pre-course hours to be completed, however, some courses do require work/projects to be finalised outside formal course hours.

B) Less developed nations:

- Total number: Information on CEP's was collected from a total of 176 ITF member nations other than those identified as the top 25 nations.
- These nations were divided into the four aforementioned groups as related to the use of the ITF coaches' education syllabi.
- 34 (19.3%) out of the 176 nations do not have a formal CEP, while 20 (11.3%) nations do have their own CEP in place.
- 108 (61.3%) out of the 176 nations follow the ITF syllabi almost entirely.
- A further 7.9% of the nations follow the ITF syllabi in combination with their own CEP.

General results:

- In summary, general information on CEP's was collected from a total of 199 ITF member nations. With 200 nations affiliated to the ITF, this represents a 99.8% return.
- Table 2 highlights the use of the ITF CE syllabi among all nations that participated in the research.
- Of the 199 nations surveyed, 82.9% (165) have a CEP in place. A finding that does not account for the ITF-organised coaches' courses, which have been held in almost all member nations (Miley, 2004).
- Of these 165 nations 27.2% (45) have developed their own CEP, 65.4% (108) use the ITF syllabi, and 8.4% (12) combine their own CEP with that of the ITF.
- Europe is the region in the world that possesses the highest number of nations with their own CEP.

CONCLUSIONS

This research effort should be considered a first step in the process of gathering more information about CEP's worldwide. Indications are that a significant number of NA's have CEP's in place, with approximately a third of all nations leading their programmes and most other nations adopting either the ITF syllabi entirely or alongside their own programmes. Preliminary findings also illustrate tremendous diversity in the characteristics of the CEP's of the top 25 tennis nations. In turn, this reveals the need for establishing equivalence between existing CEP's.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this research will lead to the establishment of more uniform guidelines and criteria for coaching courses, as well as aiding all nations in the creation of their own CEP's. More specifically, it may provide for the assimilation of CEP content, minimum entry standards, coach competencies and assessment procedures among the multitude of other pressing issues in the field.

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