

# Performance Profiling in Tennis

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*ITF Coaching and Sport Science Review 2008; 44 ( 16): 12 - 16*

## ABSTRACT

*This article presents the fundamentals of performance profiling applied to tennis. It discusses the reasons why conduct a performance profile as well as a step-by-step procedure on how to do it. It also includes two tennis-specific examples of performance profiles.*

**Key words:** Performance, profile, evaluation.

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## INTRODUCTION TO PERFORMANCE PROFILING

Performance profiling is a process whereby an athlete lists the most important attributes for their success in their sport on a performance profile (see tables). They then rate their current ability out of 10 for each attribute and set a 'target' or 'importance' score for each attribute. This helps to reveal areas that the players consider most important to their development.



## WHY TO USE PERFORMANCE PROFILING

Performance Profiling was developed from Personal Construct Theory (PCT) (Kelly, 1955), which states that the events and experiences of individuals lead to 'personal constructions' of how the individual perceived those events or experiences. The important aspect here is that it is the 'perception' not a 'reality' that are held in people's minds.

The relevance of PCT and performance profiling to working with tennis players is that, because knowledge is subjective, players may have different perceptions of their abilities to coaches. Coaches usually set the training programme for their players and often this is based on the areas where the coach 'perceives' the player needs to develop. Problems can arise with this when the perceptions the player has about their ability are different to those of the coach. In this case, the coach might be setting a schedule that the player does not agree with. For example, if the coach puts an emphasis on improving the slice-backhand approach but the player feels happy with that area of their game (or that it is less important than another area), and that the backhand cross-court drive needs more work, then the player may lack the motivation to work on the slice.

If the coach continues not to focus on areas important to the player, in favour of areas important to the coach, the player may lose motivation to work on the area the coach has focused on. This may

also affect their commitment and belief in the programme and trust in the coach.

Faced with these potential differences in perceptions, players and coaches can use performance profiling to do the following:

- Identify the attributes important to perform well in tennis
- Identify player's areas of 'perceived' strength and weakness
- Increase player's self-awareness of their abilities and what's required to excel in their sport
- Identify to the coach the areas the player may be more resistant to developing
- Highlight differences between the player's perceptions of their abilities and the coach's perception of the player's abilities

(Butler & Hardy, 1992; Butler et al, 1993; Doyle & Parfitt, 1997; Butler, 1997)

When coaches and players have this information it is easier to design a programme that the player is motivated and committed to.

## HOW TO DO A PERFORMANCE PROFILE

There are different ways the performance profile can be conducted. Players can work in groups, alone or with a coach or a sport psychologist. As the performance profile is an 'athlete-centred' process (Jones, 1993), the authors believe the player should conduct the profile alone. However, as some people struggle to generate attributes, the coach could provide a comprehensive list of all the attributes required for tennis and allow the player to select attributes from this list that they consider important.

There are different types of Performance Profiles. In this article we include two of them; one is a general Performance Profile for a tennis player, whereas the other is a Game Situation Specific Performance Profile on the serve. Besides, we also include a blank Performance Profile for players and coaches to use.

## GUIDE TO COMPLETING THE PERFORMANCE PROFILE

### 1. Generating Attributes

The player writes down the physical, mental, technical and tactical attributes that are important for their success in tennis. Many athletes have a tendency to focus solely on areas of weakness however encourage them to also list important strengths. For recreational players, attributes can be basic (forehand, backhand) but performance players should be more specific (slice second serve, concentration).

If the player has difficulty in generating or choosing attributes, the coach could then ask them to think about their favourite player and to think what attributes make them a great player (Weinberg & Gould, 2007). Players should end up with 15-20 of the most important attributes on their Performance Profile.

## 2. Rating

Players then rate themselves out of 10 for their current ability within each attribute and then set a 'realistic-ideal' target out of 10 for each attribute, to achieve within a set time period (min of 2 months, max of 1 year).

To see the areas most important to performance, the player subtracts the current rating from the 'realistic-ideal' target. Theoretically, the higher the score the greater the player perceives they need to work on the attribute.

## 3. Evaluate

The player should look at the final profile and have freedom to change any attributes or ratings to ensure they are fully confident in their profile. Especially focusing on ratings, which can often not be fully thought through at the end of the profile.

## 4. Coach Profile (Optional)

Coaches can also perform a profile of the player; generating important attributes and rating the player's current ability.

### DISCUSSING THE PROFILE WITH THE PLAYER

If the coach has their profile of the player, they can compare it to the one done by the player to see where differences exist between the player's perceptions of their abilities and targets and the coach's perceptions. The coach can then decide whether to show their profile to the player. The advantage of this can be to provide a basis for negotiation between player and coach on which areas to work and may provide motivation to the player if the coach has rated the player higher on certain attributes than they rated themselves.



The coach discusses the player's profile with the player and asks questions about why they generated certain attributes and why they gave certain ratings. If the coach feels the player's profile, and their 'perception', is inaccurate then they should go through the profile and ask the player why they feel the way they do about certain attributes. The coach should listen to the player's reasoning but also offer their perceptions and reasoning for rating the player higher or lower in each attribute.

### Set the priorities, set the goals

Once the profiles and attributes have been discussed, the coach can give the player time to amend their profile further. The player and coach should then meet to agree the profile and the training priorities and schedule.

The player can assess their profile each week and update their current ratings whenever they feel appropriate. The coach can also retain a copy of the player's profile and update it with their perceptions of the player's improvements. The profile process can be redone every 6 months to 1 year to ensure it is up-to-date with the player's training needs.

### SUMMARY

Performance Profiling gives an insight into how the player views their sport and their ability in it. Coaches who are not aware of their player's perceptions of their own game, risk losing the interest, focus and motivation of the player to their own development. Even though the coach may have to make sacrifices in not working on an area they feel is important, the player may gain more confidence by improving a different attribute that holds more concern for them during performance. This added confidence could have a positive impact on their whole game.

By discussing each other's perceptions of the player's ability, the coach can seek to question and remove negative, 'irrational' thinking the player has about their ability. Finally, by breaking down their game, players gain a clearer picture of their sport, their abilities and how to work towards improving them. The targets set by the player will provide an ongoing motivation to improve in the direction that they have agreed with their coach.

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Example of a General Performance Profile for a Tennis Player

PLAYER NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

AGE: \_\_\_\_\_ RANKING: \_\_\_\_\_ PROFILE DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Attributes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	DIFFERENCE Target minus current rating
<b>TECHNIQUE</b>											
Groundstrokes	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	2
Transition game	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red	3
Net game	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	3
Serve & Return	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	1
<b>TACTICS</b>											
Game style	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red	2
Strategy	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	4
Tactical patterns	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	2
Shot selection	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red	2
<b>CONDITION</b>											
Speed	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red	3
Power	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	0
Endurance	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	1
Flexibility	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	2
<b>MENTAL</b>											
Concentration	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	2
Motivation	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	2
Emotional control	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	1
Self-confidence	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	2

Blue line = Current Rating

Red line = 'Realistic-Ideal' Target Rating (For 6 months time)

**Example of a Specific Game Situation Performance Profile for SERVING**

**PLAYER NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**AGE:** \_\_\_\_\_ **RANKING:** \_\_\_\_\_ **PROFILE DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Attributes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	DIFFERENCE Target minus current rating
<b>TECHNIQUE</b>											
Ball toss placement	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	2
Leg Drive	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	2
Timing	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	1
Hip rotation	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	3
<b>TACTICS</b>											
Variety of placement	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	4
Second serve consistency	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	2
Disguise	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	3
Body serve	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	4
<b>CONDITION</b>											
First serve power	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	1
Coordinated action	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	0
Core strength	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	3
Flexibility	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	3
<b>MENTAL</b>											
Pre-serve routine	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	2
Arousal control	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	3
Focus	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	2
Imagery of serve action placement	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	5

Blue line = Current Rating

Red line = 'Realistic-Ideal' Target Rating (For 6 months time)

