



## In transition

*The journey from junior tennis to the professional circuit is not always smooth*

“I always thought the transition from juniors to seniors is one of the toughest things to do,” said Grigor Dimitrov. The Bulgarian turned professional in 2008 after winning two junior Grand Slams and topping the ITF junior world rankings, but it was another five years before he won his first title on the ATP World Tour.

Research shows that 50 per cent of players with a top 10 junior ranking go on to break into the ATP and WTA top 100, but with an average age of 25.2 in the WTA top 100 and 27.4 in the top 100 men, it takes time to adjust to life on the pro circuit and players cannot expect overnight success.

The professional circuit often requires players to travel further and includes new physical and psychological challenges, which takes time to adapt to, and many players will struggle initially. Even the most successful professionals needed time to develop their game style and adjust to the demands of the tour. The more experience a player has playing in this environment, the quicker they will develop coping skills and new strategies to improve.

It is important not to rush the process and the transition is an important part of a player's development. The ITF junior circuit is the ideal pathway

for aspiring professionals to follow and an opportunity to gauge their standard against other international players. The circuit is a good indicator of whether a player is prepared for the transition and a top 20 junior ranking should be the primary goal.

The age eligibility rules determine how many professional tournaments girls aged 14 to 18 can play. These rules are in place to ensure players take a controlled approach to playing on the professional circuit. Playing too early and experiencing negative results can damage a player's confidence and can lead to a loss of motivation and enthusiasm.

A structured training and tournament schedule gives players the best opportunity to perform well at pre-determined times of the year. Periodisation is important at all levels, but particularly important during the transition from junior to professional tennis. A training plan, divided into phases with specific objectives, can help to avoid a player getting stale, injury and burnout.

There are four key components of a skilled tennis performance: technical, tactical, physical and mental. All aspects of training reflect one or a combination of these areas in order for a player to develop as a well-rounded athlete and competitor.

**Real deal**  
Croatia's Borna Coric won the boys' singles at the 2013 US Open and has made a fast transition to professional tennis

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### TECHNICAL

By the time a player transitions to professional events it is rare for them to have technical weaknesses in any of the main strokes. It is important to ensure technique is sound and not likely to cause injury. Flexibility is key: players must be able to handle every type of ball hit by the opponent and deal with any combination of direction, height, spin and speed.

### TACTICAL

A game style cannot simply be based on a player's own strengths; it is important to adapt to external variables such as court surface and weather as well as being able to formulate a game plan to combat an opponent's strengths and weaknesses.

### PHYSICAL

Frequent physical testing can help identify areas of weakness where improvement is necessary. Physical conditioning should be maintained throughout the year, even during tournaments, but tailored appropriately in order for players to remain injury free and maintain a high level of performance over long periods of time.

### MENTAL

Having clearly defined goals will allow players to remain focused and motivated. All goals should be set with a time frame so results can be measured and players can see their progress even on a daily basis to keep morale high. This will allow players to approach one match at a time and manage expectations.

**ITF Advanced Coaches Manual. Information edited by Miguel Crespo and Abbie Probert.**

**Tennis iCoach is the official coaching platform from the International Tennis Federation. It is an online coach education resource offering tennis-specific sport science content on technique, tactics, psychology, biomechanics, sports medicine and coaching methodology.**  
[www.tennisicoach.com](http://www.tennisicoach.com)

## Good enough to go pro?

**Recommended career path for an aspiring professional**

Achieve a top-2 national junior ranking

Concentrate on regional U14 and U16 events to achieve regional ranking

Compete on ITF junior circuit and try to achieve top 20 ranking

Begin transition by focusing on Grade A junior events and professional tournaments

72% of players who achieved a top 10 ITF ranking between 1996-2005 achieved a career high ranking of top 100 in the WTA rankings  
[The McCraw Method (CBD Model), 2009]

On average it takes players 7.5 years to break into the WTA top 100 after achieving their first ITF Pro Circuit year-end ranking  
[The McCraw Method (CBD Model), 2009]



**Upwardly mobile**  
ATP star Grigor Dimitrov in action at Queen's Club in 2010. The Bulgarian has since established himself inside the top 30