

# CHAPTER 1: ROLES, CONTEXT, CULTURE

## **Sweet Spot**

*The purpose of the coach, player and parent is to maximise the talent of the player so that they are as successful in the sport as they can be, and to ensure that the player has a fulfilling life outside and after tennis. The coach is the primary catalyst but all three are responsible for co-creating the sweet spots that fulfil this purpose.*

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### **The Player**

The player's welfare and talent development should be the central concern of all those who are engaged in the coaching process. All developmental efforts need to be player-centred and led. The player is responsible for responding to opportunities with intelligence, openness, diligence and passion; helping people help them.

### **The Coach**

The coach is the major catalyst for the player's structured talent development and for organising and orchestrating most inputs into enabling the player's progress toward their shared goals.

### **The Parent**

The parent must be concerned primarily with the welfare of the player and their development as a full person who is not only a talented athlete.

### **The Parent/Coach**

Commitment to both roles brings a dual responsibility for talent development and the personal development of the player. Appropriate focus must be given to both roles and the responsibilities that go with them.

Our view is that the roles of the parent, coach and player are the core three that need to work in concert in order for the player's agreed ambitions to be realised. When they are working well, each fulfilling their role and responsibilities, then there will be a sweet spot where focus, activity and review are player-centred, coach-facilitated, and parent-guided and 'guardianed'.

### **Core Development Team**



Over and above the specific responsibilities they have, the player, coach and parent need to have a shared responsibility for making the trio work together as well as they can. Each is responsible for the trio's capacity to work together and learn from one another to ensure the player's success and fulfilment.

*“The major challenge with the trio is that the competencies, references and responsibilities of all three are very different”; Frank van Fraayenhoven, Former director of Coaches Education KNLTB (The Netherlands), Technical Director PELTI (Indonesian Tennis Federation).*

There will be many of these trios in the duration of a player’s career and even if the same cast of characters inhabit their roles for a long time, there will be a need for each of them to regenerate their relationship depending on changing ambitions and life situations. This need for regeneration and the process it follows are discussed later in Chapter 2.

### **Other Roles**

Other functions, depending on evolving needs, will necessarily be added in or jettisoned from time to time. These will include:

- Partners, husbands, wives, girlfriends, boyfriends
- School and University teachers
- Specialist coaches
- Tennis team members
- Physiotherapists
- Sports psychologists
- Business managers
- Marketing professionals
- Sports medicine practitioners
- Sponsors

- Supporters, fans and audience.

These will cluster around the core team as and where needed; being central from time to time and moving on appropriately.

## The Wider Team



Whoever is in play at any particular time needs to be aware of all the others' activities and how they impinge on and augment one another. This will maximise their ability to help one another in the purpose of enabling the core team to ensure the realisation of the player-led vision. They also need to feel responsible for making the wider team work, as well as for the contribution of their individual function.

## The Magic of Three

Having at least three in a relationship is the best way of ensuring that learning happens. Pairs can and do operate well but, crucially, can't always see the patterns that build up, both helpful and unhelpful, between them. Having a third party gives a real possibility of increasing the power of any positive dynamics in the pair, and naming and diminishing

the negative blind spots that can retard the impact of the relationship. Of course, at any stage the parent, coach or player is the third person for the remaining pair.

There is a dark side to three. The black magic that occurs when negatives in the relationship are unexamined, the 'drama triangle', is evoked and played out in destructive ways. One party takes up the role of victim, another of persecutor, and the third of rescuer. Any one of the player, coach or parent can operate in any of the three roles. This interplay is often at the heart of any breakdown within the core team. The most easily identifiable one is where the coach is seen as oppressor, the player as victim and the parent as rescuer of the victim; however any one can be in any role at any time. These drama triangles are difficult to sort through as their existence can be a result of a predisposition of attitude and the elements in play and the amount of stress in the circumstances that exist in the moment. They quickly become a sour spot when a continuing pattern emerges where no learning is available because of perceived slights, judgementally loaded behaviour, and sentimental lush responses and blame occur. Below are three examples of the sour spot playing out:

#### Parent

A parent watches their child compete and train through a deficit lens: negative and frequently verbally abusive, constantly comparing their child's performances to their peers, making them feel judged and inadequate, leading to bouts of depression. The coach then spends copious amounts of time building compensatory confidence in the player. The precious time the coach spends with the player is now centred on the growth of the individual's resilience to deal with the parent's destructive comments and

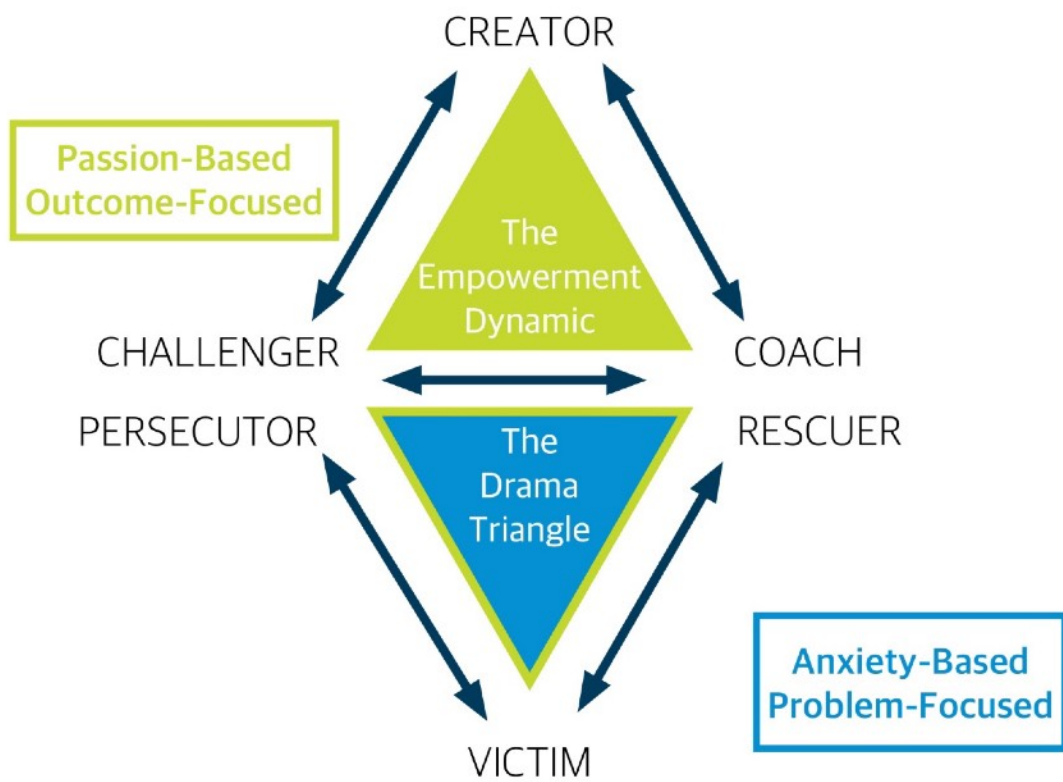
behaviours, losing time and energy working on the genuine developmental goals of the player.

### Coach

A strong-minded parent always watches their son's tennis lesson with the coach. They interfere constantly, questioning the coach and disagreeing with them in front of the player. The parent also controls the session structure, telling the coach when they should finish a drill, what they should work on next, how they should teach, what they should say. Over time, the coach starts to feel redundant in the decision-making process and even starts to coach through the voice of the parent, repeating what the parent wants the coach to say. The player, who enjoys learning from the coach, senses the coach is losing confidence and motivation to have to deal with the situation, and by speaking up, rescues the coach, affirming their competence.

### Player

A player struggles to deal with the pressures of competition and chooses to use their parent as a punch bag to verbalise their anger and frustration. The player swears at the parent, blames the parent, and shouts sarcastically at them. The parent feels restricted in how to respond and therefore stays silent, becoming a victim of constant abuse throughout the match. The coach takes a call later that evening from the dejected and emotionally exhausted parent, counselling them to make sense of the situation, providing reassurance and possible solutions for a brighter future.



*(The Empowerment Dynamic by David Emerald, based on Karpman's Drama Triangle)*

These sour cycles are most likely to appear when stakes are high, emotions are charged and people feel trapped; in other words when there is a chance of losing in a win-lose game. In reality, tennis is a win-lose game. If the persecutor, rescuer, victim cycle

becomes a habit for the trio, with each person entrenched in their position, this will minimise their capacity to work fruitfully together.

When the trio is working at their best, they move away from the anxiety-based, problem-focused drama triangle, towards the sweet spot of an empowerment relationship which is passion-based and outcome-focussed, and therefore creative. Each of the trio appropriately takes turns as coach, challenger and creator to maximise the learning for one another.



It needs awareness from at least one of the three to notice and name that the trio is playing out the drama triangle and begin a conversation to return them to the empowerment dynamic. These conversations can feel difficult, in that there is likely to be some challenge or confrontation of each other's behaviour.

*“Coaches need to understand the importance of the parents’ and athletes’ home life. The coach makes the athlete and parent feel part of the planning and designing process. They make the parents feel important, but they also establish clear boundaries early in the relationship. Get their trust first, then have difficult conversations”. **Andrew Russell**, Director of High Performance, Carlton Football Club.*

Crucially, difficult conversations are needed for the trio to flourish. There will always be time in the ongoing relationship where disarray and disharmony are prevalent, therefore not having the difficult conversations is dangerous, and having the capacity to hold



useful difficult conversations is essential. What seems difficult to one may seem easy to another but in all spheres of life we all have things left unsaid, both positive and negative, that if stated well could contribute usefully to joint purpose. We will continually advocate in this book that the so-called difficult conversation is crucial to oxygenating relationships. The initial difficult conversation often needs to be with ourselves to front up to our less useful inner dialogue which stops us being ruthlessly compassionate with ourselves and others.

*“Relationships are built on trust, open, honest communication is key... people will never thank you for leading them into a ‘false sense of security’”. Garry Cahill, Performance Director, Tennis Ireland.*

We examine coaching conversations further later in this chapter.

### **Constructing a Fruitful Tennis Reality**

Tennis is a hierarchical sport. Points, games, sets and matches are won or lost, players are ranked on how much they win or lose, and everyone has a ranking. The potential for mass anger, despair and capitulation is huge. The coach’s, player’s and parent’s attitude to what is a win-lose game are vital to how far a player can go and what can be achieved through learning.

*“As a tennis player, you have to get used to losing every week. Unless you win the tournament, you always go home a loser. But you have to take the positive out of a defeat and go back to work. Improve to fail better.” Stanislas Wawrinka*

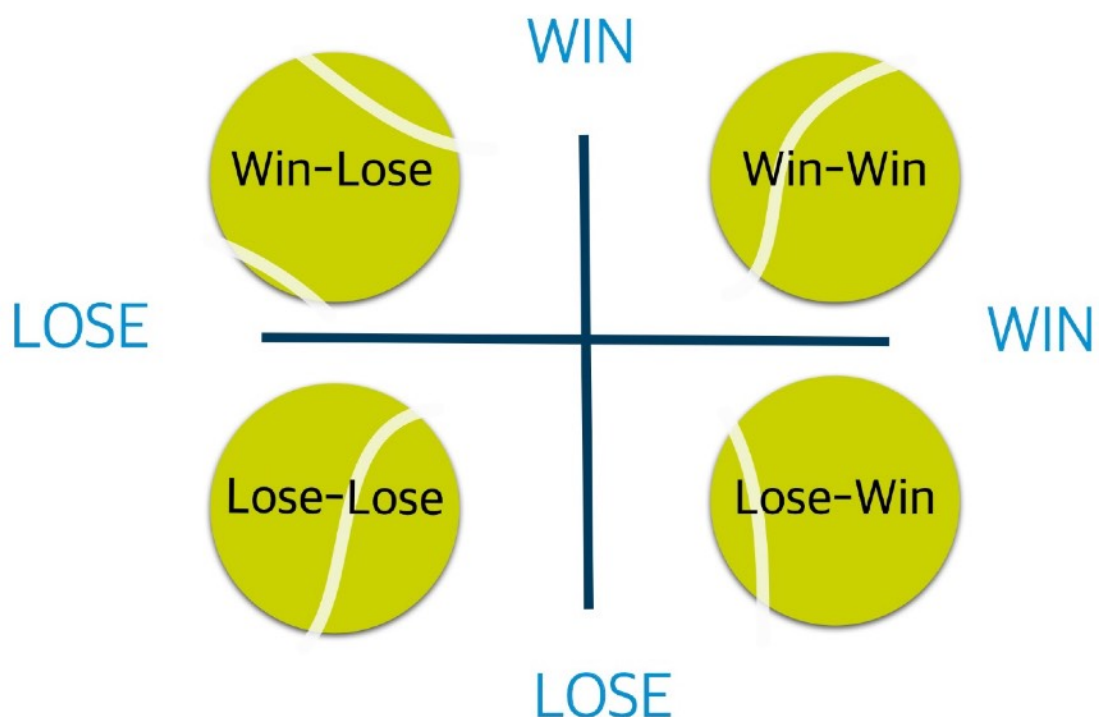
Four attitudes can be adopted in the way in which we look at sport. The other positions, other than **win-lose**, available to players, parents and coaches are:

**Lose-lose** – players enter the battlefield, and coaches and parents view the combat as a game which no-one can win cleanly; it's just an attritional ritual that leaves even the winner feeling bad about themselves and their achievements.

**Lose-win** – this attitude is evident when players believe they have no chance, and parents and coaches watch on with resignation at the inevitable defeat.

**Win-win** – occurs when all parties believe that success is available in abundance and comes in many forms rather than being a scarce resource available only to one winner.

*“I’m not really scared of losing, it’s part of the game. When I go into the match, I always look forward; always try to look for the best outcome. So, in a way I aim to stay in the present and enjoy the game for what it is and whatever the outcome. I try to play good tennis every time I’m out there on the court, so that’s been my way of thinking and that’s how I play my best tennis as well”. Felix Auger Aliassime*



*“You’ve got to get to the stage of life where going for it is more important than winning or losing.” Arthur Ashe*

Our view is that to be at your best as a development trio...

**Players** need to have a number of goals that allow for win-win outcomes. These include:

- Setting higher-order goals so that losing in one circumstance enables a longer, wider, deeper win later
- Setting subordinate goals around excellence of effort and attainment; so, a goal in a game might be about a higher percentage of first serve completion, first serve percentage points won, moving the opponent around, higher percentage points won when attacking, staying calm and competitive throughout the match, or returning first serves. Success here is a real victory, even if the match is lost; when learning is continuous, talent development happens and winning follows.

**Coaches** – need to view the game as an adventure which will create many varied rewards for themselves, players and parents. They do this by ensuring that the agreed common purpose for engagement with the sport creates value for players and parents as often as possible so that goals are stretching and attainable, learning is challenging and fun, and that failure in a game does not mean failure in life.

**Parents** – need to provide a loving, nurturing context to put the game into perspective, always seeking the best for the player in a way which allows the player to build a life as well as a career. Whatever the potential a player has when they start to play, only a few will reach world ranking. Parents need to notice and reinforce that there are many paths to a fulfilled life connected to tennis; matching ambition and reality is one of their tasks.

Of course, every youngster that falls in love with a sport has dreams: winning Wimbledon or Olympic gold. These dreams fuel the passion that results in years of effort

that develops a sporting habit for life. There are huge life and sporting benefits for players even if they are not one of the tiny minority who reach the top.

Junior tennis is a great and rewarding journey for players, coaches and parents, and sets the foundations for a lifetime in tennis in many different ways.

If the player, coach and parent can forge an understanding very early on in their relationship that their separate and joint purpose is to approach the game in a fiercely competitive way, but with an underlying ethos of taking every opportunity to create respectful win-win relationships, then the trio will develop themselves and their sport in a value-creating mode. This is evident in the way that the top players push one another on by demanding they transcend their last loss to create their next win with their great rivals and compatriots who truly respect one another. Although tennis is a win-lose game, it is a win-win sport and can provide a win-win career.

### **Engaging with Tennis – The Benefits**

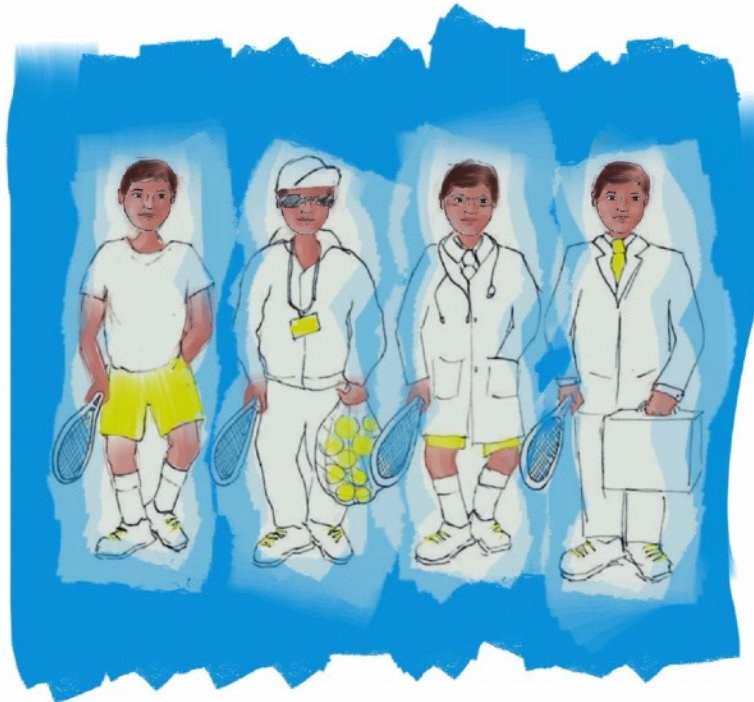
- 1) Physical health benefits of an immersion into tennis. They are immense as tennis is a complete physical sport. Players develop excellent core athletic abilities, like flexibility and endurance.
- 2) Life health benefits. Research proves time and time again that children who have immersed themselves into sport are less likely to drink, smoke or take drugs.
- 3) The Copenhagen City Heart study suggests that social interaction positively impacts longevity of those who play tennis.

### **Tennis Teaches Players...**

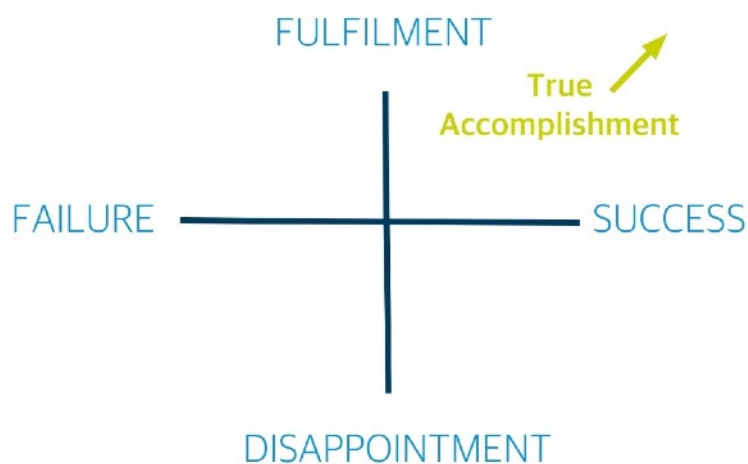
- 4) How to set goals and plan.
- 5) To be team players.
- 6) The essential self-discipline that's at the core of what we all achieve.
- 7) To interact socially with people, often older, and/or from other countries.
- 8) To achieve the small goals that build up strong self-confidence.
- 9) To be able to cope with life's ups and downs: to be resilient.

### **Education and Career Benefits**

- 10) Scholarships to university.
- 11) Graduates in sport earn on average eighteen percent more than others. Nine out of ten employers said they clearly identify the link between playing sport and desirable skills in the workplace.
- 12) Becoming tennis coaches.
- 13) Building, leading and managing tennis-related businesses.



So, in summary, the work of the player, parent and coach, over the time frames they agree to work together, is to ensure that the player learns what they require to learn, and achieves what they need to achieve in order to move to the next level of possibility; to be the best player and the best person they can become. Success and failure are important but so are disappointment and fulfilment.



(Buckner/Roderick)

As a core team, the player, parent and coach will strive to move away from failure and generate success. This will be marked by points, games, sets and matches being won or lost, and the status which goes with this. However, true accomplishment can only be achieved when success is coupled with fulfilment, where the player has experienced the intrinsic rewards that come with feelings of mastery, flow, momentum and an integrated life.

*“High performance is 'abnormal' but leads to the development of actualization skills that are transferable to other facets of life. High performing athletes will never be normal or have the same type of balance as the other 99% of the population, but if they develop character, gratitude and optimism they can be much happier and fulfilled than others”.* **USTA National Coach**

Both success and fulfilment can also be the legitimate goals of the coach and parent as well as the player. The tennis life is rich enough in opportunities and problems for coaches to become better people and leaders, as well as better technical coaches.

Similarly, parents can grow to being the best they can be as parent and citizen, as well as being great tennis parents.

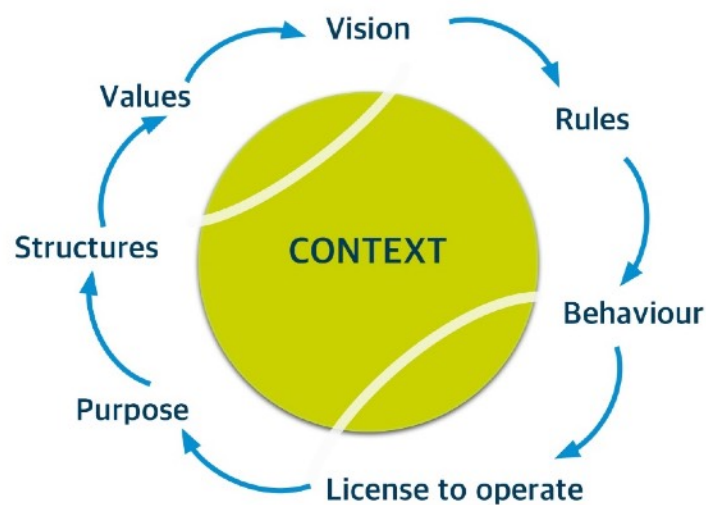
The coach's, parent's and player's capacity to deliver sweet spot experiences depend, to a degree, on the present context and culture in which tennis exists. The culture, climate, atmosphere, and context can have a profound effect on how the trio deal with the general circumstances that affect their purpose. We can call this the coaching context, and coaches, players and parents not only need to understand it but play an active part in changing it when and where appropriate.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

Setting, and ensuring that the context is always relevant to the needs of the stakeholders, is primarily the responsibility of the governing bodies, the officials concerned with adjudicating the sport, and the administrators who provide the structure for the sport to flourish over time, and it is far too important just to be left to them.

The issues that are in play are:

- License to operate
- Purpose
- Values
- Vision
- Structures
- Rules
- Behaviour.





When these are aligned and working in concert then a sweet spot occurs where everyone involved can pursue being the best they can be. When there is discord, energy flows into fighting issues, a sour spot, rather than playing and enjoying tennis.

### **License to Operate**

Does the sport and its organising structures have the right within the eyes of a civil society to exist, to operate? Does the sport add value for citizens and society or is it exploitative, destructive and harmful to the populace? At the margin, is it legal or illegal?

### **Purpose**

Tied to this is what the sport exists to do. Do those engaged with the sport focus on ensuring that the sport creates wellbeing for its participants and supporters, or is it hell-bent on extending and deepening the vested interests of self-aggrandising elites or insatiable commercial individuals and organisations?

### **Values**

Espousing and living by a set of values provides the underpinning of the code that supports the purpose and provides the spirit with which the sport conducts itself. In our view, the manner in which you play the sport is as important as how well you play it. There needs to be espoused values about:

- Opportunities to play
- Fairness
- How rules and structures are formed, adjudicated and reacted to
- The spirit in which the game is played
- How business is conducted within the sport; both administrative and commercial

- How to challenge the status quo.

## **Vision**

What is the future for the sport and what consequences and outcomes are being aimed at?

Players, coaches and parents join with the excitement of a clearly articulated vision that is grounded in reality yet sets challenging goals for the sport and therefore for them.

## **Structures**

The basis for most sporting structures were formed in eras long past when how society conducted itself was different. Some examples are:

- Competitions
- Leagues
- Ladders
- Clubs
- Regions
- Counties
- Communities
- Governing bodies.

These structures often reflect outdated needs. They are, however, very difficult to change as they are held in place by vested interests that resist the need for regeneration. Not all structural change is useful. For example, reformatting structures is seen as an easy route to commercial gain. This can be detrimental to the sport.

## **Rules**

Need to be rooted in values and reflect the needs of the present and future participants. The changing landscape of physical prowess, need for spectator variety, wellbeing of players, and marketability of the sport, all mean that rules need to be regularly examined and reset.

## **Behaviour**

What those involved with the sport do and say. The consistency of message is important here. Players, coaches and parents who achieve success in the sport, whether they like it or not, become role models for the wider population, so what they do and say outside of the sport becomes important for their sport.

This context is important for all coaches, players and parents, because if this set of governance elements do not exist, are not publicly available and are out of sync with one another or the present needs of society, then they will rear up as obstacles to the aspirations of players, coaches, parents and fans. Some examples are:

- There is an active movement to diminish rating and ranking for children in sport.
- The needs of tournament directors for revenue can mean longer games played at inappropriate times.
- Players, coaches and parents behave in destructive and exploitative ways, not engaging in the spirit of the game, and bending and breaking the rules.
- Betting formats make subtle cheating profitable and encourage addiction in the general population.
- Outdated bureaucracy in the way in which tournaments are run can lead to frustration and drop in form.
- Commercial needs can be seen to trump players' needs.
- Fans are treated with contempt by arrogant, insolent players.

This context, or the fabric on which the game is played out, provides the background music to the sport and it is the legitimate role of the coaches, players and parents to address it if the rhythm is discordant or a new score needs to be written. We talk more about the coach, player and parent as leaders in the sport and society in Chapter 7.

## THE COACHING CULTURE

By coaching culture, we mean the social, economic, political and educational circumstances with which coaches, players and parents need to interact in order for all to learn and talent to flourish. It is important to understand this context because by examining past, present and future possibilities, the positive forces within the culture can be harnessed and the unproductive elements avoided. Some of the major influences that will have an effect on the accomplishments of players, coaches and parents at present include:

### **Social**

- The continued need for people to interact with others with purpose and for fun and recreation. Sport continues to bind people into communities and tribes that provide a sense of identity, engagement and excitement. This is likely to lead to more initiatives and focus on tennis teams of various sorts. The recent introduction of the Laver Cup and the newly designed Davis Cup format are examples at the professional level which will undoubtedly drive more appetite for team-based competitions at all stages of the pathway.
- A whole life approach to sport is now more prevalent; sport is no longer the prime preserve of the young, the talented and the able bodied. It is now seen more often as a way of nourishing everyone's individual and collective wellbeing within and over

lifetimes. The drive against obesity and the increased participation in wheelchair tennis are clear examples here.

- Gender roles are restructuring and once excluded groups are now mainstream. Tennis has traditionally been a richly diverse sport and this trend is likely to continue. It's more acceptable in society, and tennis, for females to increasingly take lead roles in all functions involved in tennis.
- Talented players continue to be, and are increasingly seen as, role models for children and society in general. There is growing perception that sport is and should be a metaphor for life; for good and for ill. This places pressure on sports people to represent a set of values in the manner in which they conduct themselves within their sport. How they go about living their lives becomes as important as how well they perform. They are leaders, not just role models.
- The duty of care that governing bodies, coaches, players and parents have has been refined and defined to prevent abuse of all sorts. This drive to create safe places for people to learn, play and flourish in a safe environment will continue.
- Sport continues to be a democratising, levelling arena. No matter what your social/ economic background, there are more and more opportunities to build respect, confidence, and a solid sense of identity, by engaging in sporting activities. Talent identification as a process has become pervasive in most sports, so even a glimmer of talent will be noticed.

## CONTINUING

## GROWING

### SOCIAL

Individual	→	Affinity groups/Teams
Skill	→	Wellbeing
Exclusive	→	Richly diverse
Role models	→	Leaders
Turning a blind eye	→	Safeguarding
Elite	→	Democratic
Predominantly male leadership	→	Gender non-biased leadership

### Economic

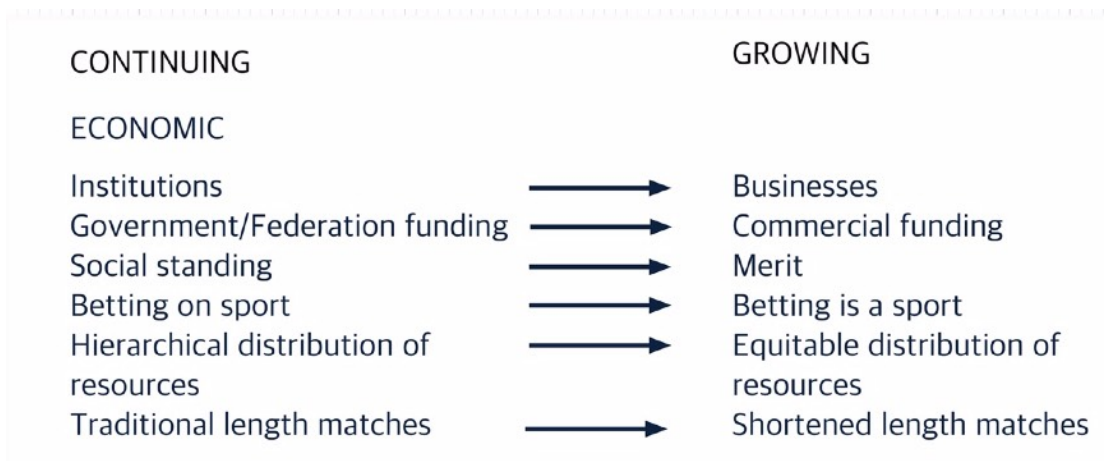
- The potential for large profits and huge losses abound in sport. The ownership of sporting clubs and events is an irresistible magnet for people who have made money in other areas of endeavour and their motivations range from altruism to narcissism, to a need for another profit stream. At its best, this can create a virtuous cycle where an investor has integrated sport within a community, built top class multi-sport arenas, provided great opportunities for learning, increased wellbeing, and created a legacy that will enable them to be remembered fondly, as well as having made them a profit. At its worst, the sport becomes a plaything, subject to the arbitrary whims and prejudices of the investor, alienating stakeholders, and even if a few trophies are won, no lasting accomplishment is achieved.
- There are contradictory economic forces in the funding and provision of exercise-based learning. On the one hand, government money is focused more on the funding of more science-based opportunities, which tend to lead to schools having to fund more activity-based learning themselves and therefore providing fewer general opportunities of expression and learning through exercise. On the other hand, this has created a gap for academies whose core function is to educate through exercise

as well as provide a general curriculum. Many sports now have a rigorous, well-funded academy system feeding in talent to their respective sports.

- Athletic prowess has long been an entry mechanism to economic success. Bursaries and scholarships to schools and universities which specialise in particular sports both open up opportunities for a career in sport and a career in general.
- The funding of sport by betting companies has become problematic in two ways. Betting has become a sport in itself and with the rise of variable, spread and in-game betting, has fostered a different mindset and value-set into sport: “it doesn’t matter who wins the game as long as I win the bet”. In addition, it has become easier to manipulate the game without being caught. Subtle mistakes can now be profitable.
- Being at the top of your sport will always remain vastly economically profitable. There is however, a growing consciousness that the grass roots are what builds the sport; the audience that funds the returns and buys the merchandise. To complete this sweet spot, you need journeymen and craftspeople on their way up or out, not just the artists at the top of the profession. This realisation has meant a more equitable distribution at all levels of sport and this should continue as a trend.
- There are legitimate arguments for shortening tennis matches; players’ and spectators’ concentrations spans and wellbeing needs nod towards reducing match time. However, some of the pressure comes from television executives trying to streamline their schedules and attract higher audiences.
- The rise of zero hours contracts and the gig economy has downgraded the value placed on some coaches, particularly at entry level. Paying the coach solely for the hours they are on court teaching versus a more all-round holistic service can stall a player’s development. There will be a growing tendency to want and to be prepared

to pay for a more holistic service that can accelerate the player's development.

Travelling to competitions, goal setting, and interdisciplinary organisation across the team, are all examples of the additional services a coach should provide, and charge for, with an aspirational professional player.



## Political

- Sport always has been and will continue to be an instrument of social control. Keeping the masses busy engaged as spectators and consumers, and giving hormone-fuelled adolescents something to do other than disrupt society is an ongoing trend which allows the population to engage in win/lose activities which are mainly non-destructive to society in general.
- Even though there is a swing toward player-led decision making in sport in general and tennis in particular, the political leadership of governance bodies is still hierarchical and mainly unaccountable to anyone but themselves. There is still a huge amount of vested interest, both economic and psychological, in ensuring that sports stay within historical boundaries and that the privilege that goes with poorly regulated fiefdoms continues for the satisfaction of the governing bodies. This restricts the potential of the sport for generating value for all its stakeholders. It is



now also possible to have a career in sports administration. At its best this means people creating value because they are imbued with the spirit of the sport and what it stands for, and understand best tennis process practice. At its worst, they are interested in wielding power without a proper understanding of the sport and its potentials; for example, funding for medal share rather than the good of the sport.

- There is increased confusion about allegiance; where do coaches, players and parents place their loyalty? The conventional loyalty to representing country as sovereign, is breaking down and an individual's allegiance to themselves, their families, clubs, teams and communities place sometimes competing demands on players, coaches and parents. This is particularly true in tennis where the Grand Slams are seen as much more important than representing your country, except every four years at the Olympic Games.

## CONTINUING

## GROWING

### POLITICAL



## Educational

- There is a growing realisation that being appropriately authoritative and enabling, depending on the learner and the context, is the way forward. Just telling people what they should do or just letting them figure it out for themselves can never be enough. This places the onus on the educator to be extremely flexible in their approach and style. It also means that understanding the athlete and the context becomes an important skill in itself.

- Educating a whole person for a whole life is now more clearly seen as an approach that creates value for all. Taking a regenerative, cradle to cradle, approach, where the education process creates value for individuals, families, communities and society in general is now being seen more clearly as a potential goal.
- Sport now offers a range of career destinations, not just being recognised as being successful in sporting competitions but other areas central to sporting success, such as medicine, science, management, coaching, marketing, retail, and administration. Young people now know that they do not have to disengage from sport because they are not able to attain elite athlete status. This opens up all kinds of educational routes not previously seen in a sports context.

## CONTINUING

## GROWING

### EDUCATIONAL

One best way learning	→	All best way learning
Skill sets for sport	→	Whole person, whole life
Elite player	→	Elite learner

## Technological

- The ability to communicate instantly, constantly, with everyone has become a double-edged sword. In one way it serves to build a sweet spot where people comment favourably on posted success, thereby building confidence and prowess. The opposite phenomenon is probably more prominent, where a sour spot is provoked by constant attention on any shortcoming or failure which leads to lack of confidence and fall off in skill.
- Availability of videos of best, and worst, practices in sport have greatly enhanced the potential for learning. This ability to call up images of best practice instantly as it is

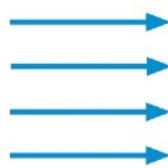
needed, is a boon for players, coaches and parents. This, coupled with the capability of filming and instantly reviewing the player's own performance, gives invaluable feedback for learning.

- Video also enables coaches to concentrate on micro skills rather than just general skills sets.
- Sports data can now be arranged in such a way that it stops being just numbers, and starts to become useful information, and even wisdom, that helps plan game strategy and tactics, as well as being a powerful tool for player development.

### CONTINUING

#### TECHNOLOGICAL

Affects thinking  
Slow access  
General skill focus  
Data



### GROWING

Affects feelings  
Instant access  
Micro skill focus  
Useful information

## Contextual Patterns and Trends in Sport

### CONTINUING

### GROWING

#### SOCIAL

Individual	→	Affinity groups/Teams
Skill	→	Wellbeing
Exclusive	→	Richly diverse
Role models	→	Leaders
Turning a blind eye	→	Safeguarding
Elite	→	Democratic
Predominantly male leadership	→	Gender non-biased leadership

#### ECONOMIC

Institutions	→	Businesses
Government/Federation funding	→	Commercial funding
Social standing	→	Merit
Betting on sport	→	Betting is a sport
Hierarchical distribution of resources	→	Equitable distribution of resources
Traditional length matches	→	Shortened length matches

#### POLITICAL

Ad hoc social control	→	Organised social control
Status quo governance	→	Value-creating governance
Nation state	→	Communities, clubs, teams, individuals

## EDUCATIONAL

One best way learning	→	All best way learning
Skill sets for sport	→	Whole person, whole life
Elite player	→	Elite learner

## TECHNOLOGICAL

Affects thinking	→	Affects feelings
Slow access	→	Instant access
General skill focus	→	Micro skill focus
Data	→	Useful information

### **The Consequences of these Trends and Patterns for Tennis Coaches, Players and Parents**

Laying out a context for sport like this allows us to see the dynamics of some of the complexity and ambiguity that face tennis coaches, players and parents as they go about navigating their way to both a successful and a fulfilling tennis life.

The major questions the coach, player and parent will have to deal with will probably be:

- Are we behaving ethically, with integrity?
- Are we accessing and utilising all learning channels?
- How do we harness what the governing bodies offer as resources without being trapped in their bureaucracy?
- How do we challenge and change inappropriate authority?
- How do we continually build our knowledge and skill and make it available to a wider audience?
- What's the best way of managing our business process and results?

- Are we taking our social responsibilities seriously?
- How do we make the best use of available technology?
- How do we contribute to the future of our sport?
- How do we remain curious about learning as people as well as coaches, players and parents?

Most of the trends have been around over time and most are intensifying. The nature of the circumstances facing the changing trio will always be different. Regularly revisiting what the context is and the emerging questions that arise will help the player, coach, parent to be always relevant, always on the learning edge, rather than dealing with stale, outmoded ways of doing things.



Having examined the various roles that create sweet spots and the context and culture that need to be engaged with and changed when necessary, we now turn to the issue of how parents and players choose coaches and vice versa.

## THE COACHING PROCESS – A NEEDS-BASED APPROACH

We lay out the basic process here and will unpack the various elements in later chapters.

The initial choosing of a coach for a young player is the responsibility of the parent and the player. As learning needs change and therefore a change of coach is required, if the relationships between the player, parent and coach have been robust enough, then the

present coach can also be part of choosing the next coach. Of course, the coach also chooses who to work with. Our view is that the best choices are made when every party is chosen rather than a coach being hired to do a job.

### **The Coaching Need**

The player and the parent need to have enough of a sense of the player's development needs over at least the next three months. This need will be refined by conversations and assessments carried out with prospective coaches.

### **Potential Coaching Relationships**

The player and the parent need access to a pool of potential coaches and the coaches need access to a pool of potential players. This means them activating their tennis community and network in order to discover who is available.

### **Joint Assessment**

A shortlist of coaches who can help need to have conversations with parents and players about:

- The player's coaching needs and required outcomes
- The coach's style
- How the parents and players want to work with the coach and vice-versa.

These will be amplified by practical sessions playing/drilling with the coach for the player and parent to see the coach in action with them and vice versa.

### **Contracting**

Starting with the end in mind and with a clear agreed process and protocols about how the relationship should work is vital to success. Areas that need a contract:



- Duration of relationship
- How the core team will work together
- What the skill development/learning focus will be
- Practical issues, fees, venues, cancellation policies, and so on.

### **Planning**

A joint planning session where what needs to be done is mapped out.

### **Coaching Session**

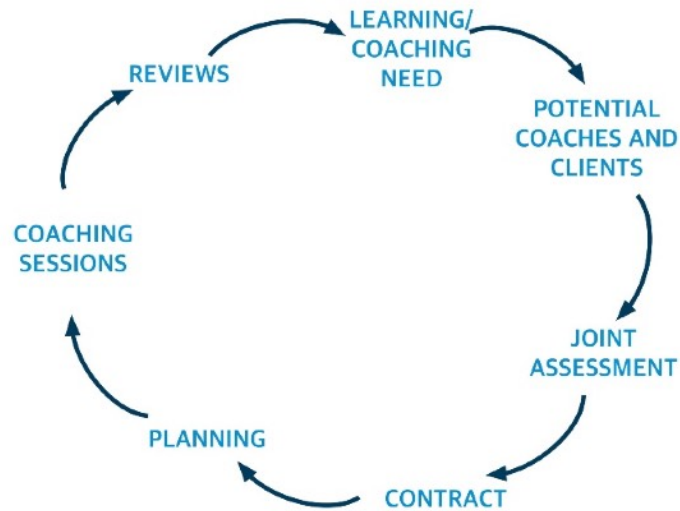
The player and the coach arrive at every session having completed any work agreed to happen between sessions and a clear view of what they will be working on in that session.

The session is punctuated by rigorous feedback for the player and the coach.

### **Reviews**

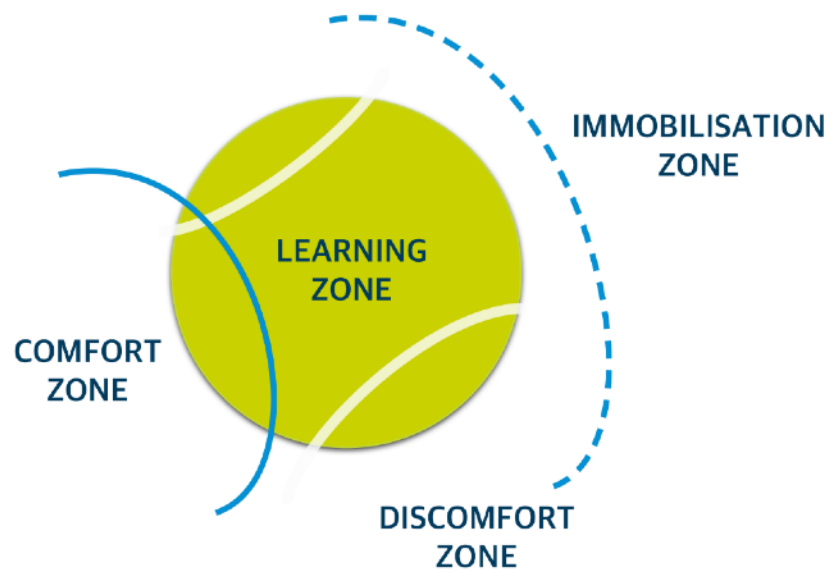
At the end of each session and at staging posts within the agreed time frame, reviews need to take place, answering questions such as:

- Are the learning needs and performance outcomes being met?
- How are our styles and methods meshing?
- Have the learning needs changed?
- What do we need to do going forward?

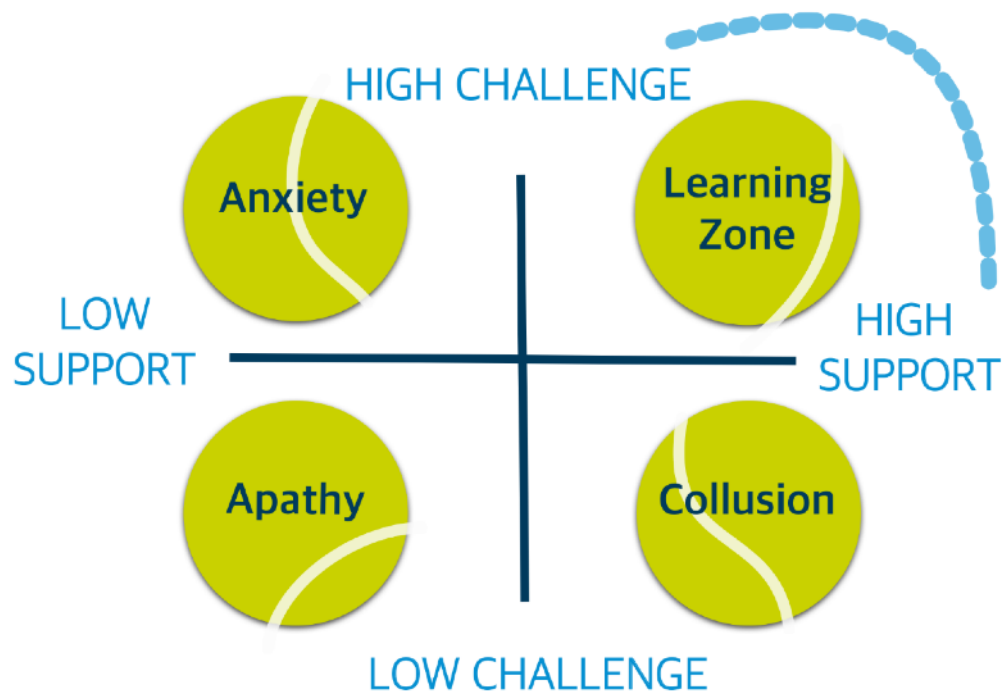


### **Choosing a Coach and Choosing a Parent/Player**

The first three elements of the diagram above are about choosing a coach. When choosing a coach, at any level, what players and parents are seeking is a relationship which will stimulate the player to constantly be in their learning zone where performance enhancement is always possible. Coaches need to be able to position the player between their comfort zone and their discomfort zone in a learning zone where performance improvement is accelerated. Putting the player under too much pressure will result in them becoming immobilized and learning will not be possible.



What parents and players are looking for is a coach who uses the appropriate amount of support and challenge to make sure the player is in their learning zone as often as possible. Different players need different degrees of support and challenge to help them remain in their learning zone. Great coaches have the ability to assess the right mixture for the players they are working with.



*(Mariani)*

### **Anxiety**

If there is too much challenge with little or no support, the player is likely to feel overwhelmed. This anxiety can lead to mistakes, accidents and lowering of confidence.

### **Collusion**

If the player is never challenged in training then there is little likelihood of them raising their game or dealing with the inevitable pressure during a match. Here the coach, player and parent collude with one another that everything is fine as it is.

### **Apathy**

The negative consequences of a learner receiving low challenge and low support will include lack of interest and application, and no passion for improving – why bother?

So, choosing a coach who expresses an appropriate range of capability to both support and challenge is vital. This will need a degree of self-knowledge from the player and input from the parent; they should know approximately what they need in this area before approaching a coach.

The coach needs also to be aware of how much support and challenge the player and the parent want to bring to bear on them as a coach. This will determine whether the coach wants to work with them. If parents or players are overly aggressive, apathetic or smug, the coach might want to place their efforts elsewhere.

## **Trust**

Another area to consider when choosing coaches and clients is to gauge how quickly and deeply trust can be established; to know one another's capacity to be credible, reliable, and if they can build strong, lasting, intimate relationships. Again, at its best trust needs to be between all parties.

## **Credibility**

This means that all parties, but particularly the coach, can do what they say they can do and know what they say they know.

## **Reliability**

This means all of the trio sticking to their commitments. These commitments can be about time, quality of effort, amount of energy or type of attitude, and will have formed part of the mutually agreed contract.

*“When working as part of the team for Kevin Anderson (ATP 5 2018) everyone knew exactly what was going on and trusted each other. We had an open communication channel and we all understood our roles. We would have tough conversations in the team with open and*

*honest dialogue. It wasn't about who is right but what is right for the situation, so the context drove the decisions". Allistair McCaw, Author, Speaker, Mindset and Sports performance Consultant to players Dinara Safina, Jelena Dokic, Xavier Malisse, Bernard Tomic, Mary Pierce, Hyeon Chung and Kevin Anderson.*

### **Intimacy**

How skilful each of the trio are at building intimate relationships where it is all right to talk about deeper emotional issues that may be holding your joint endeavour back.

### **Self-Orientation**

No matter how credible, reliable or engaging they are, if any of the trio is seen by the others as exploiting them or manipulating them for self-interest then trust will be hard to build and maintain. People hate feeling used, and these feelings lead to the breakdown of trust and therefore relationships.

These elements of trust are explored in David Maister, Charles Green and Robert Galford's book *The Trusted Advisor* (2000).

Focusing in on the credibility of the **coach**, parents and players should be searching for coaches who display the following three characteristics:

### **Authority**

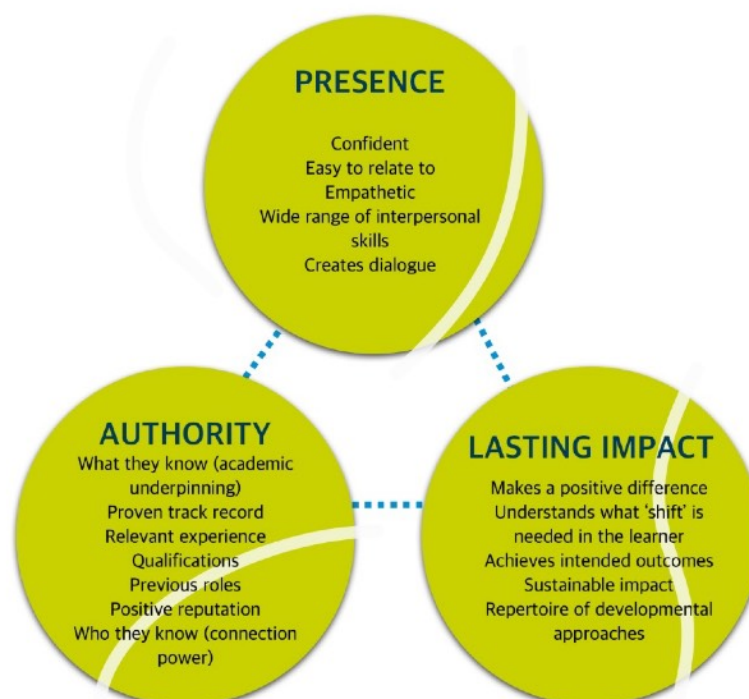
Authority is perceived when coaches describe what they have done and achieved, and who and what they know, with fluency and conviction. Established coaches will have built up a brand which will be recognisable from their websites, blogs, writing and word-of-mouth reputation. Underpinning all this, they must have all the relevant coaching qualifications.

### **Presence**

Presence is about attitude and interpersonal style. Are they energetic, passionate, clearly present and engaged? Do they display a love of learning and a love of tennis? Presence is also about their capability to identify common ground, and quickly establish a personal connection.

### **Lasting Impact**

Lasting impact is the outcome that all three parties are looking for from every interaction. The coach must have a track record or, if very inexperienced, convey a sense of making a positive difference, achieving intended outcomes, and do this by having a repertoire of developmental approaches.



The majority of the world's tennis governing bodies offer a coaching qualification pathway to ensure all coaches meet minimum standards. The International Tennis Federation provides coach education in many countries that don't have a formalised coach education pathway. Parents and players should check with their governing body that the coach they wish to

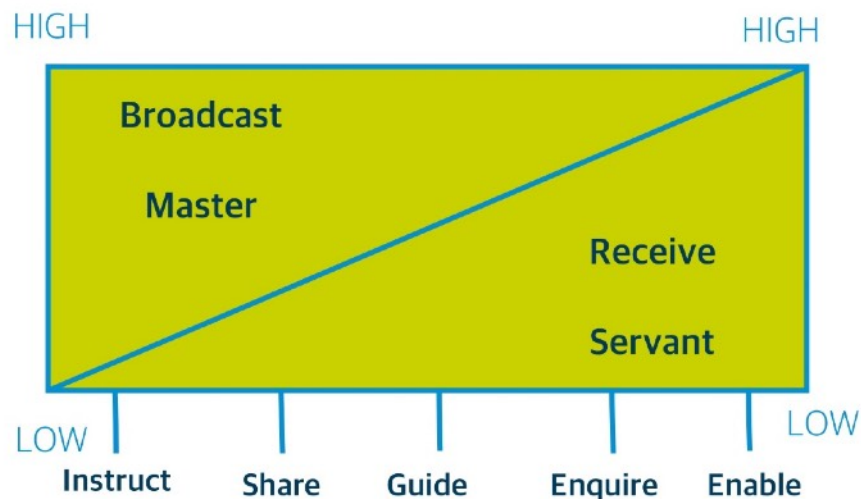
contract with is a qualified/accredited coach. In the UK, this means they are an LTA qualified coach, who has trained and has passed an examination to meet the requirements of that specific qualification.



Finally, in choosing a coach it is important to understand how coaching has evolved over time and where the coaches you are assessing fit in that evolution. A quick way of discovering a coach's style is to assess them on a broadcaster-receiver spectrum. Historically, coaching was perceived to be a broadcasting process. Coaches who knew stuff would pass that knowledge on to people who didn't know it. The coach was the font from which the learner drank and therefore gained new life. This hierarchical, top down approach is typified by instructions, drills, rewards, and punishments. A more modern approach is to see the learner as the centre of development potential. The coach is empathetic and supportive of the needs of the learner, listening, receiving, guiding the learner's thinking by asking questions that allow the learner to problem-solve for themselves.



The issue for the players and parents is to quickly ascertain if the prospective coach can both receive and broadcast appropriately or are they stuck in a groove they can't get out of; the master imparting wisdom or the servant, looking to satisfy the needs of the learner. This is examined further in Chapter 5.



Great coaches exhibit the capacity to be at all of these stages between broadcasting and receiving as appropriate to the player's needs.

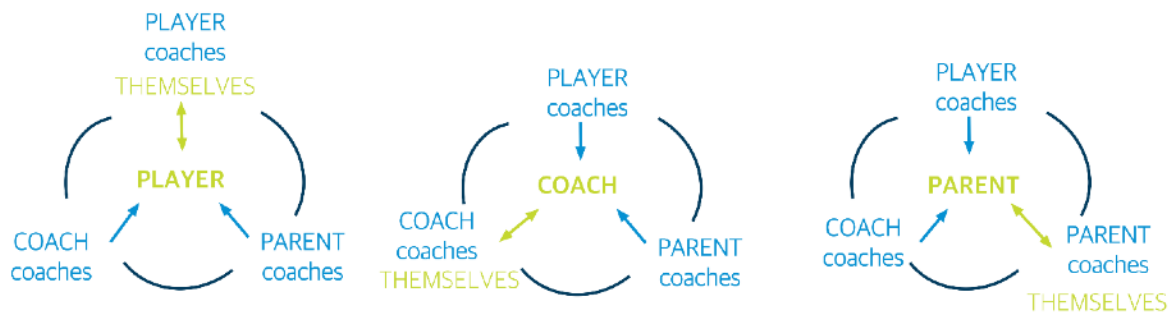
## COACHING CONVERSATIONS

Our view is that everyone in the coach, player, parent trio is responsible for the success and fulfilment of the player, and one another. All three are responsible and accountable, to differing degrees at different times, for talent to flourish and lives to be usefully lived.

Success, being the best player, parent or coach you can be, and fulfilment, being the best

person you aspire to, depends on learning. So all three need to be coaches that enable learning for one another, depending on the need and the context.

At various times:



When this working at its best, it is a sweet spot, a virtuous cycle where everyone is helping everyone to be at their best as player, coach and parent. Experience over the years with many coaching trios has shown that this sweet spot can be extremely productive. However, unless this interdependence is clearly stated and everyone is aware and committed to their roles, then it is hard to achieve. It does happen spontaneously, often serendipitously, for short periods of time but to have a marked prolonged positive effect it needs to be planned for and reviewed rigorously.

The coach is the prime catalyst for individual learning and will need to instigate and nurture the trio's sweet spot relationships; however, everyone is responsible for everyone's learning. This will probably never be perfect but it is a goal worth aiming for as the payoffs of even a partly functioning virtuous cycle, are prodigious.

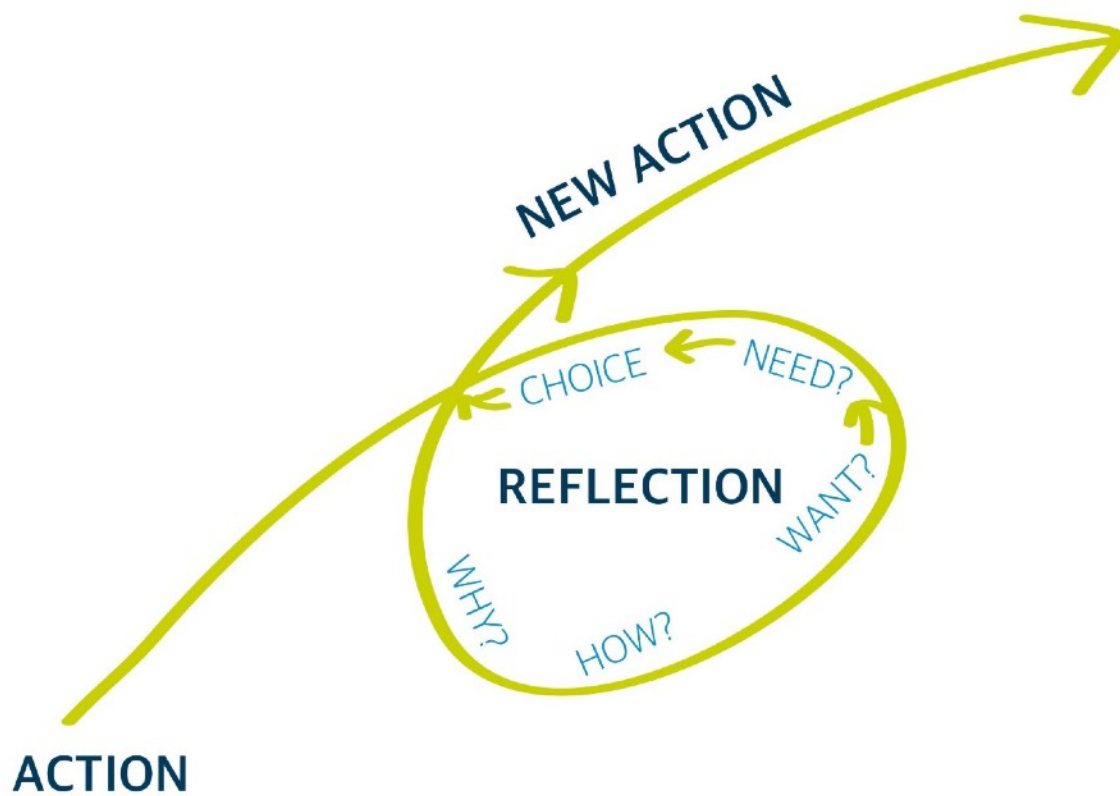
Learning occurs as a result of an appropriate conversation. The purpose of the conversation should be clear and the desired outcomes explicit. Coaching conversations are conversations with purpose, designed to provide reflection time focussed on what is in the present and what can be in the future. Most of us live our lives in ACTION-REACTION-ACTION-REACTION

loops where we do something, see the consequences and react to these consequences. A reflective life and coaching conversations are more complex; they follow ACTION-REFLECTION-NEW ACTION loops.

The reflection is multi-dimensional:

- Why we did what we did
- The conviction with which we did what we did
- The manner in which we did it
- The range of reactions provoked by what we did
- Did what we did get us what we wanted in the short term?
- Did what we did get us what we needed in the longer term?
- What do we need to do to adjust or transform our actions to get what we need?

This is a natural loop and is available to everyone. However, we need to remember to go through it and to do it thoroughly rather than just focus on our favourite aspects of the loop. As a very general view there is a tendency to focus on 'how' to do it differently, rather than learning from the whole opportunity that reflection affords. Loop learning is examined further in Chapter 3.



As we noted earlier when talking about so called difficult conversations, the fundamental conversations are the ones we have with ourselves in our heads. If we can't incorporate useful external voices into our inner dialogue then no learning will happen. Asking ourselves the right questions and being honest in the way we appraise our intentions, efforts and outcomes, and how we integrate feedback from others, will inevitably lead to learning. We do all, however, have blind spots, embedded preferences and prejudices which restrict our capacity to coach ourselves. This is where coaching from others is vital. We cannot hope to be the best we can be if we don't use the perception and wisdom of others to enable us. The need for outside assistance and the form these conversations need to take will vary depending on the context that the player, coach and parent are in.



The structure of how reflection is used to enable learning is most helpful when all parties know the structure they are supposed to be following. This idea of agreeing how we will structure our coaching conversations is further examined in Chapter 5 when we look at the concept of contracting.

*“As a starting point, defining what ‘effective coaching’ looks and sounds like is key. Having a clear collective understanding of this end-point will allow stakeholders to more easily come on the journey to this agreed destination. Further, clearly articulating the benefits of ‘effective coaching’ to all individuals involved is important (however selfish or selfless these benefits may be). As the word implies, ‘building’ a coaching culture takes a great architect, many labourers, the right tools, and time!” Callum Beale, Head of Talent & Performance Operations, Tennis Australia*