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PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION AND THE PSYCHOSOCIAL QUALITIES OF JUNIOR TENNIS PLAYERS: A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS ON SPORTS PERFORMANCE

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The importance of tennis as an individual sport transcends mere physical activity. It is a holistic discipline that cultivates not only a healthy and strong body, but also a sharp mind and solid emotional balance. Tennis players learn valuable lessons about self-discipline, resilience, strategic thinking, and managing emotions, skills that are useful not only on the court, but in all aspects of life. The quality of communication between parents and children is a determining factor not only in the sporting success of young tennis players, but also in their development as balanced and resilient individuals. A family environment based on open communication, unconditional support, and mutual respect is essential for developing athletes who not only excel on the court but also thrive in everyday life.

Keywords: *communication, competitive performance, family relationships, junior tennis players.*

COMUNICAREA PĂRINTE-COPIL ȘI CALITĂȚILE PSIHOSOCIALE ALE TENISMENILOR JUNIORI: O ANALIZĂ DETALIATĂ A IMPACTULUI RELAȚIEI FAMILIALE ASUPRA PERFORMANȚEI SPORTIVE

Importanța tenisului ca sport individual transcende simpla activitate fizică. Este o disciplină holistică ce cultivă nu doar un corp sănătos și puternic, ci și o minte ageră și un echilibru emoțional solid. Jucătorii de tenis învață lecții valoroase despre autodisciplină, rezistență, gândire strategică și gestionarea emoțiilor, abilități utile nu numai pe teren, ci în toate aspectele vieții. Calitatea comunicării dintre părinți și copii este un factor determinant nu numai în succesul sportiv al tinerilor jucători de tenis, ci și în dezvoltarea lor ca indivizi echilibrați și rezistenți. Un mediu familial bazat pe comunicare deschisă, sprijin necondiționat și respect reciproc este esențial pentru dezvoltarea unor sportivi care nu numai că excelează pe teren, dar prosperă și în viața de zi cu zi.

Cuvinte-cheie: *comunicare, performanță competitivă, relații familiale, jucători juniori de tenis.*

Introduction

In the world of competitive sports, especially at a young age, the interaction between parents and children goes beyond simple logistical support. It becomes an essential pillar in the overall development of the junior athlete. To fully understand this impact, it is important to clearly define the concepts of **parent-child communication** and **psychosocial qualities** in the specific context of sports [3, 4].

The exchange of information and emotions and thoughts and attitudes and expectations between parents and their children forms the basis of **parent-child communication.** The sporting environment contains specific communication elements which affect junior athletes through direct and indirect means during their athletic experience. The communication between parents and children in sports requires both verbal and non-verbal methods which include active listening and constructive feedback and emotional control [8].

The fundamental elements of sports-based parent-child communication consist of [1]:

- The expression of complete acceptance and love without any reference to athletic achievements defines emotional support in sports. The parent should provide comfort after losses and motivation during challenging times while recognizing the child’s hard work instead of focusing only on winning.

- The delivery of performance feedback should include specific helpful observations which help athletes improve their results instead of using destructive criticism. The delivery of feedback requires balance because it should show both positive aspects and areas that need improvement while maintaining the child’s self-assurance.

- The process of goal-setting involves parents discussing competitive sports challenges and performance expectations with their children. The child will avoid feeling overwhelmed or like a failure when parents maintain open dialogue about their expectations.
- The ability to handle pressure involves helping children discuss their competitive stress and anxiety and teaching them effective coping methods while creating a secure space for emotional expression.
- The process of autonomy development in sports requires parents to support their children in making their own decisions based on age and maturity level while encouraging self-responsibility and goal-setting. The communication process should support their opinions while giving them freedom to discover their own path.
- The coach and parents need to maintain effective communication to deliver consistent messages that support the shared objectives of the child.

The development of trust and mutual respect and understanding through balanced communication creates a secure environment for junior tennis players to thrive in their sporting careers [12].

Research hypothesis. It was assumed that effective communication between parent and child contributes significantly to the development of the psychosocial qualities necessary for top performance in junior tennis players.

Research objectives: to explore the mechanisms through which communication influences the competitive activity of junior tennis players, to identify specific qualities and to propose strategies for improving the parent-child relationship.

Materials and methods

The research focuses on junior tennis players between 12 and 14 years old who play at tennis clubs within Chișinău city together with their parents. The research included 40 parent-child pairs to achieve sufficient statistical power. The study required voluntary participation from all participants while both parents and children (with parental permission for minors) signed consent forms. The research used multiple validated assessment tools which previous studies had proven effective for data collection. The research instruments consisted of three standardized questionnaires [10, 13] which participants completed separately as parents and children.

- **The parent-adolescent communication scale** evaluated the quality of communication between participants through their assessment of open or problematic interactions.
- **The questionnaire about sports practice** psychosocial qualities measured tennis player attributes including resilience and self-esteem and emotion control and internal drive.
- **The parent questionnaire** evaluated parenting styles through three categories: authoritarian, permissive and democratic which impact both communication and child growth.
- **The sports performance record** contains factual information about junior tennis players' athletic achievements including their national standing and their win-loss statistics from previous seasons.

Tennis is characterized by a unique combination of physical, mental, and emotional demands, making it an extremely complex and rewarding discipline. Beyond the athletic spectacle, tennis is a true school of life, shaping strong characters and offering profound benefits on multiple levels.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of tennis as an individual sport is the intensity of its mental demands [9]. Players must make quick decisions under pressure from their opponent and the crowd, anticipate their opponent's movements, develop game strategies, and constantly adapt to changes during the match. **Concentration** is essential to keep focus on the ball and the opponent, while **tactical thinking** allows the player to identify the opponent's weaknesses and exploit them to their advantage. **Mental toughness** is important for overcoming difficult moments, such as losing a decisive point or set, and for maintaining a positive attitude regardless of the final score of the match.

In addition to physical and mental aspects, tennis is a major test of emotional intelligence. The player is alone on the court, without a partner to rely on and support them, and must manage their own emotions. **Emotional control** is crucial to avoid frustration, anger, or discouragement, which can affect the course of the match. **Perseverance** is necessary to keep fighting, even when things are not going according to plan. Tennis also trains **discipline** and **patience,** as success does not come overnight and the training process

must be consistent. The ability to withstand pressure in important matches, remain calm in critical moments, and maintain confidence in one's own abilities are emotional skills developed and strengthened through playing tennis.

The development of essential psychosocial qualities for high athletic performance in junior competitive sports requires parents to maintain effective communication with their children under the high-pressure environment of competition. The development of resilience and self-confidence and inner motivation finds its base in open family communication that supports physical and technical training [1].

The first step of effective communication requires parents to listen attentively while acknowledging their child's emotions. A child who feels secure in sharing their sports-related happiness and sadness and concerns and letdowns with their parents will develop a strong bond with their parents. The trust between parent and child develops into self-esteem which makes the child feel important and capable despite all their past failures.

Junior tennis players develop inner motivation through communication that emphasizes their enjoyment of playing tennis and their personal achievements instead of focusing solely on winning. Parents who help their children create individualized targets for improvement enable performance discussions to shift from winning requirements to achievement targets and development pathways. The child gains independence in their development process while experiencing fulfillment from their athletic training journey [5].

Through proper communication parents demonstrate important behaviors which include empathy and respect for opponents and referees and emotional control during matches. The combination of fair play discussions and sports ethics education and teamwork training within the training team framework helps young athletes develop social abilities and maintain emotional stability.

Kids often try hard to make their parents happy. They put their parents' needs and expectations ahead of their own skills, talents, interests, and preferences. Children can really achieve things; they can have passions that are fueled by hard work and parents who encourage them to do their best. These passions come from the children's own choices, with their parents' help. For high-achieving kids, healthy choices look like this:

Parents who expect too much from their kids

Most parents want their kids to do well. Kids today learn two or three languages in preschool, play at least one instrument, and do theater, arts, or sports. From a young age, kids „must” do well in as many areas as possible; they „must” do well in order to move up the social ladder as quickly and as high as possible. Our kids „must” achieve success in school, sports, or other activities. In these cases, we mean a „must” that doesn't work. A lot of the time, kids who do well in school give their parents „reasons to be proud” and make them feel good about themselves. But do kids always want to do their best? How do kids decide to do well? Do parents „push” their kids to do their best on the right path?

From these questions, we can see some differences between what we, as parents, want and what our kids really want. We can also see how much we put our own wants on them, which makes them, in a way, responsible for our happiness, which is not good.

What does it mean to be a mindful parent?

A mindful parent considers the child's true best interests, not just what is stated. A mindful parent pays attention to what their child can really do, not just what kids are learning these days or how to fill their free time.

Many kids are driven and supported by their parents, who also take charge of their own education and the activities they do outside of school. Kids who do well in school are those who are talented and have enough internal drive to keep going through the hard work and sacrifices it takes to reach their goals.

A mindful parent pays attention to the „desires-skills-talent” triangle, which includes the child's daily efforts to be successful. They are aware of what the child is giving up to reach a certain level of success and the cost-benefit ratio between what the child loses and what they gain. A mindful parent is interested in what performance really means in the field their child has chosen, such as how much time each day the child spends on the subject they are studying, what the child gives up to achieve performance, what the child's real chances are of getting good and very good results in the chosen subject, what it means for the child in the short and long term, and what work is needed to get those results.

Results and discussions

The role of parent-child communication in sports development

The different ways parents communicate with their children affect junior tennis player performance at both training sessions and competitive matches.

- **Verbal communication.** The way parents communicate with their children through words establishes the foundation which determines their athletic mindset and competitive results. The words parents use in their communication with their junior athlete either strengthen or weaken their motivation and self-assurance. Constructive feedback stands as an essential requirement for reaching performance levels in competitive sports at every stage. Parents should concentrate on how much effort their child puts into their activities instead of focusing solely on achievement results. A better approach to feedback would be to say "I observed your dedication during today's match" instead of "Your performance was terrible because you lost." The child should identify their next steps for improvement. The process of goal-setting discussions along with success and failure management helps players enhance their performance. Parents should refrain from excessive criticism because it creates burnout and anxiety which might cause their child to stop playing sports.

- **Nonverbal communication.** The way you communicate through body language and facial expressions and voice tone delivers stronger messages than spoken words. The way you express yourself through body language and facial expressions and voice tone delivers messages that often surpass the meaning of your actual words. A parent watching from the stands with their arms folded and their face showing displeasure will express their negative emotions even when they remain silent. The player on court receives complete support through a parent's calm demeanor and their encouraging smile and gestures even when the team loses a point. The game requires nonverbal communication to help players manage their anxiety while receiving essential support during challenging moments.

The way parents communicate with their children affects multiple vital elements of their relationship

The following elements determine the highest possible success for junior tennis competitors in competitive play [7]:

- **Motivation.** The way parents communicate with their children directly affects their internal drive to play tennis because they find joy in development rather than feeling forced to do so. Parents who emphasize effort and progress and the enjoyment of playing help their children develop internal motivation that stems from within. The use of external rewards such as excessive praise or material gifts for sports performance will eventually reduce player motivation because it creates dependency on external validation.

- **Managing stress and anxiety.** The individual nature of tennis creates overwhelming stress for players who compete on court while their support team faces similar challenges. Junior tennis players find emotional safety through open and empathetic communication which enables them to share their feelings about stress and failures and expectations. Athletes who engage in truthful conversations learn to handle their fears while acquiring effective strategies to deal with all types of challenges both on and off the playing field. The absence of open communication between parents and children allows negative emotions to accumulate into mental health problems.

- **Decision-making and problem-solving.** The process of developing independence and critical thinking skills stands as a major advantage for your child. Parents should promote dialogue through their questions which include "What did you learn from today's match?" and "What approach do you believe was best for that particular point?" The development of junior tennis players' court decision-making skills through these aspects leads to more mature and independent athletic behavior.

- **The coach-athlete relationship.** Parents serve as connectors between athletes and coaches but they sometimes create barriers between them. Parents who communicate effectively create a strong bond between athletes and coaches while maintaining their supportive role and showing respect for coaching authority. The combination of persistent coach criticism with conflicting instructions through problematic communication creates confusion that disrupts the professional growth of junior tennis players.

The essential psychosocial characteristics which determine success in junior competitive tennis need identification and thorough analysis

Any athlete requires mental and emotional strength to handle competitive stress while achieving their best potential in sports but tennis demands these qualities the most [2, 3].

- **Resilience** is perhaps the most important mental quality in tennis. This sport is full of defeats, lost points, and unforced errors. Resilience is a player's ability to bounce back after defeats, overcome disappointments, and reassert themselves against their opponent. Resilient athletes see failures not as the end of the road, but as an opportunity to learn. They are able to quickly refocus their energy and concentrate on the next point, regardless of the final score of the match.

- **Discipline and work ethic.** Success is not accidental, but the result of daily work and discipline throughout the athlete's competitive career. These qualities are manifested through commitment to training, adherence to physical and mental preparation routines, and dedication to the continuous improvement of the training process. A disciplined player understands that every element, technical procedure, training session, or sacrifice contributes to future performance.

- **Focus and attention.** In a match, a player's ability to maintain focus is a huge competitive advantage. Top players can block out distractions from the crowd, referees, and opponents' comments and remain present in the moment regardless of external challenges. This power of concentration allows them to make quick and correct decisions under pressure, anticipate their opponent's moves, and execute shots with precision to win the decisive point.

- **Self-confidence.** Self-confidence is the player's firm belief in their own abilities and potential. This confidence is not mere arrogance, but a certainty based on physical and technical training over many years of work. Under pressure, a self-confident player will risk a winning shot, serve with confidence, and make bold decisions on the court.

- **Managing emotions and adaptability.** Tennis is an emotional rollercoaster. Fear, frustration, and anger can arise at any moment during a match. The ability to recognize and manage one's own negative emotions is crucial to reaching the winning point. Various coping techniques (e.g., deep breathing, a short ritual before serving) are used to calm down and return to a positive attitude and focus on the match.

- **Perseverance.** Perseverance is the ability to continue sporting activity despite obstacles, a decline in professional performance, or a lack of immediate results. A persevering player will continue the training process even when they do not achieve significant results, trusting that hard work will eventually pay off.

Conclusions

It's hard to be a parent to young athletes, and it's even harder for parents of gifted kids. Because of this, coaches and teachers should help parents as much as they can when they teach their kids how to play sports. Every child requires help that is tailored to their requirements, and every parent-child connection is different.

Because of this, it's hard to come up with basic rules for what kind of help young athletes should have. The following topics show how parents' actions can affect kids who play sports in both good and bad ways.

Focusing on the good things. Every youngster requires emotional support, such constructive criticism or personal encouragement. Parents should also not talk about the outcome of the game, but instead about how dedicated their kids are and how much progress they have made. These kinds of support not only help kids do better in sports, but they also help them feel better overall. Instead of worrying about the score, parents should provide their kids emotional support and help them improve their sports skills. Give the child helpful feedback on their behavior and commitment. The delight of playing sports is important, and it gets even better when kids get support from their parents.

Not getting into negative cycles. Sadly, parental support can also hurt kids, even if they don't mean to. Some parents only praise their kids when they do well, but when they don't do well, they don't care about practices and contests. This kind of mindset might make kids too focused on doing well, which can make them feel bad when they can't do what they want to do. Strong parental participation can be seen as (negative) pressure or (positive) support. Parents may help their kids more by helping them meet four basic psychological needs:

Self-efficacy: Does the youngster think they are doing a good job? Parents may help their kids feel more capable by letting them do things that make them feel good, like winning at sports or doing well at home. This makes it easier for kids to reach their goals or perhaps do their finest work ever.

Intrinsic motivation: Is the child acting on a feeling they have inside? You can help your kids be intrinsically motivated by letting them play sports and by being a good role model as a parent.

Self-regulation: Can the youngster handle their own emotional changes? Kids can learn to control their emotions at home and at practice, which will help them control themselves better. This helps kids pay more attention during practice and better control and deal with their feelings. The main question about self-efficacy in a social setting is: Do kids know what kind of social environment they are in and how they affect it? Kids learn to work with others and observe how their actions affect them when they play sports. This makes people feel more confident in social situations. Success in competitive tennis is not only characterized by physical talent, but is a complex combination of psychosocial skills. Developing these qualities–from resilience and discipline to emotion management and communication–is a necessary and ongoing process that, like physical training, requires constant support, guidance, and dedication.

Improving parent-child communication takes effort and patience, but investing in this area is worthwhile and will bring huge benefits in the future for the harmonious development of the junior athlete and for strengthening an unconditional, strong, and loving parent-child relationship.

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