Running Head: PARENTAL STRESS IN YOUTH SPORT

Stress in youth sport: A developmental investigation of tennis parents

Chris Harwood, PhD and Camilla Knight,

Loughborough University

This is the final accepted manuscript of an article accepted for publication by Elsevier in Psychology of Sport and Exercise. The online version of this article is available from doi:10.1016/j.psychsport.2009.01.005

Abstract

Objective

This study investigated the stage-specific stressors experienced by British tennis parents whose children were situated either in the sampling, specializing or investment stages of participation in the sport (Côté, 1999).

Design and method

A qualitative design was employed with semi-structured interviews conducted with twenty two British tennis parents; six parents representing the first two stages of sports participation and ten representing the investment stage. Data was analyzed through a process of inductive content analysis following the method proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Data matrices were developed for each category of parent to allow for the comparison of the data between themes.

Results and conclusion

Three general dimensions of parental stressor emerged: competition, organizational, and developmental. Competition stressors related to issues associated with their child's matches; organizational stressors included demands related to finance, time, training, and the national governing body; and developmental stressors centered on worries about education, tennis transitions, and future decision making. While sampling stage parents encountered fewer developmental stressors than later stage parents, competition stressors were highly prominent. Organizational stressors were particularly foremost for specializing and investment stage parents. Implications are discussed with reference to further research into the parental stress and coping process and to the importance of stage-specific tennis parent education and support initiatives.

Key words: parent, tennis, stress, developmental, youth sport

Stress in youth sport: A developmental investigation of tennis parents

In March 2006, Christophe Fauviau, a 43 year old father of two French teenage players was found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to eight years in prison. Over the preceding years he had spiked 28 of his son's opponent's drinks bottles with Temesta, an anti-anxiety drug that caused severe dizziness and drowsiness on court. During his trial, Fauviau explained that "I could no longer cope. I had come to hate the sport ... Every match became a terrible anguish. I became convinced that I was being judged permanently by the success or failure of my children" (cited in Lichfield, 2006). His arrest came after Fauviau had drugged Alexandre Lagardere, one of his son's opponents, who was subsequently killed after losing control of his car following his withdrawal from the match.

Fauviau's story is perhaps a tragic reminder of the stress and resulting long term psychological and behavioral strain experienced by a father in his role as a tennis parent (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2006, 2008; Hellstedt, 1987; Lazarus, 2006). Indeed, much of the research on sport parents tends to incorporate a negative view of parents, often using the lens of coaches and athletes perceptions (DeFrancesco & Johnson, 1997; Gould et al., 2008; Hellstedt, 1990; Leff & Hoyle, 1995). However, whilst the study of personal, competition, and organizational stressors faced by athletes and coaches has a well-developed literature base (e.g., Hanton, Fletcher & Coughlan, 2005; Giacobbi, Foore & Weinberg, 2004; Gould & Weinberg, 1985; Gould, Eklund & Jackson., 1993; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Woodman & Hardy, 2001), limited attention has been afforded to the range of stressors experienced by parents as they support their child through their stages of sport development (Côtè, 1999).

Parents play a critical role in children's socialization to sport and throughout their sporting lives (Brustad, 1996; Wuerth, Lee & Alfermann, 2004). Fredricks and Eccles (2004)

noted that parents fulfill three fundamental roles in their child's sport experience. These are firstly as 'provider' (e.g., of opportunities, finance, transport); as 'interpreter' of the sport experience for their child (e.g., emotionally reacting to competition in adaptive manners); and finally, as 'role model' (i.e., modeling the ideal attributes and behaviors in sport). The extent to which these roles are fulfilled by parents influences a child's beliefs and values and in turn, their motivated behaviors and performance.

Nevertheless, the extensive emotional, financial, and logistical support that parents prioritize for their children (see Baxter-Jones & Maffuli, 2003; Kirk et al., 1997a; Kirk et al., 1997b; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005) may come at a cost with respect to the stress that they experience. Indeed, like Fauviau, the negative influence and impact of parents often reported by coaches and athletes anecdotally, and in youth sport research is potentially related to stressors that they experience in their parental roles.

In establishing a line of research into stress from a parental perspective, Harwood and Knight (2008) investigated the stressors articulated by one hundred and twenty three British tennis parents. The wide range of stressors emerging from their open-ended survey coalesced into seven core themes of parental stress. These included stressors associated with attendance at matches and tournaments; coaches behaviors and responsibilities, financial and time demands placed upon the family; sibling resentment and unequal attention; inefficiencies and inequalities attributed to tennis organizations; and developmental concerns related to educational and future tennis transitions. Whilst this study provided a much needed insight into the scope of stressors experienced in the sport-parent role, it lacked an in-depth analysis of how such stressors may differ depending upon a child's stage of development (Côtè, 1999). Such insights would provide practitioners, coaches, and governing body organizations with a deeper, evidence-based appreciation of the main issues and needs of parents across the key transitional stages of their child's sport participation.

A number of researchers have identified stages that athletes pass through during their sports career or involvement (e.g., Balyi, 2000; Bloom, 1985; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Côtè's (1999) stages of sport participation model is frequently adopted because it is sport specific and sensitive to the developmental transitions children experience (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Within the context of this study, Côtè's model is of interest because it focuses on the first eighteen years of an athlete's development, when parental requirements are likely to be at their greatest.

Côtè (1999) identified four stages of participation: sampling, specializing, investment, and recreation; the first three of which are relevant to the current study His model traces sport participation from early childhood to late adolescence and identifies differences in the experiences and requirements of athletes during each stage. The role and requirements of parents have also been noted to change throughout these stages (see Côtè, 1999; Côtè & Hay, 2002; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005).

In the sampling years, families play a central role in the athlete's development. Family time is devoted to a number of activities, but much time is devoted to sport. Parents play clear 'provider' roles and are responsible for initiating sports activities and ensuring transportation and access (Durand-Bush, Salmela & Thomson, 2005). Parents are required to be highly committed to their child's sport, displayed through altered family routines as well as emotional and financial support (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). During this stage, however, fun is of utmost importance to athletes, emphasizing deliberate play rather than intense training (Côtè & Hay, 2002).

During the specializing stage, sport-specific skills develop through practice, with a reduction in deliberate play (Côtè & Hay, 2002). Parents take a growing interest in their child as an athlete and make an increasing financial and time commitment (Côtè, 1999; Durand-Bush et al., 2005). The time commitment is such that other opportunities are often sacrificed

for a child's sport. Furthermore, there is a premium placed on a parent's nurturing role alongside the provision of moral and socio-emotional support (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005; Wuerth et al., 2004).

Finally, athletes reach the investment years. At this stage the child pursues the aim of reaching an elite level in their chosen sport. Children increase the intensity of their commitment to one sport and there is a substantial increase in deliberate practice (Côtè & Hay, 2002). Parents' levels of support and interest in their child-athlete may result in them displaying different treatment toward their other children (Durand-Bush et al., 2005; Wuerth et al., 2004). Nevertheless, during this stage, parents' actual requirements may begin to decrease as coaches play a larger role.

Considering the differing emotional, financial, and logistical requirements of parents, the experiences of athletes, and the changing competition and training demands associated with each stage of development, it is conceivable that parental stressors may also vary. Therefore, in extending the work of Harwood and Knight (2008), the purpose of this study was to conduct an in-depth, comparative examination of the stressors perceived by British tennis parents whose children were located within one of the three stages of sport participation (Côtè, 1999). The investigation formed part of a research and education initiative supported by Great Britain's tennis governing body, the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA). The overall aim was to develop a clearer understanding of stage-specific parental stressors so that appropriate resources and support would enable parents towards positive role-related influences on their children's talent development in the sport.

Method

Participants

The sample comprised 22 tennis parents: Nine mothers, five fathers, and four sets of parents. The sample was divided into three groups: six parents of performance juniors, six

parents of top county/low national standard players, and ten parents of national and international (academy) standard players. The performance juniors (three boys and two girls) were aged between 9 and 11 and were classified as being in the sampling stage. The second category accounted for parents of four boys and two girls aged from 11 to 16 and considered as being in the specializing stage. The final group comprised parents of academy players, aged 12 to 16. These players trained at national tennis academies and fulfilled the characteristics of athletes in the investment stage. Six players resided full time at the academies and two commuted daily, with all players on modified educational programs.

The classification of players to stages utilized Côté and Hay's (2002) criteria as closely as possible and occurred through discussion with the players' parents and coaches. These discussions revolved around (a) the current focus of training sessions (deliberate play or deliberate practice), (b) players involvement in other sports, and (c) the emphasis placed upon general motor skill development compared to tennis-specific skills training.

Procedure

A purposive sampling strategy highlighted 25 tennis parents who were available and interested in engaging in this study. These parents were identified through discussions with county officials, coaches, and clubs. Three parents subsequently withdrew from the study due to personal commitments.

Semi-structured interviews were deemed the most appropriate method of data collection for this study because they allow in-depth information to be gained from participants discussing their interpretation of the tennis experience and expressing situations from their own point of view (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This was particularly important in the study considering the subjective and individual nature of stress. (Lazarus, 2006).

Data collection

A semi-structured interview guide was developed based upon results of an open-ended survey of British tennis parents (Harwood & Knight, 2008), the requirements of sports parents, and potentially stressful areas highlighted in past research (e.g., Kirk et al., 1997a, 1997b; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). The interview guide contained introductory questions about the parent's general experiences of stress in tennis, followed by a focus on several specific categories. These included matches and competitions; coaching and training; finances; national governing body and other organizations; personal, social, and family life; education and transitions; and final comments.

All interviews were conducted by a female interviewer, who was also a qualified professional coach with a high level of tennis playing experience. This served to facilitate the development of rapport with the participants and a closeness to the phenomena under investigation. Prior to carrying out the interviews, two pilot interviews were completed with parents of a sampling stage and a specializing stage junior. These lasted 45 and 52 minutes respectively and were taped and reviewed with the co-author. Both pilot interviews allowed the interviewer to rehearse and refine the interview procedure, including the efficient use of elaboration and clarification probes. The pilot interviews resulted in the rewording of the initial question, the inclusion of a general introductory question asking parents to list stressful areas, the creation of a time and family life section and the addition of questions relating to travel, and organization and timings of tournaments. The pilot process subsequently reduced the potential for interviews to deviate through the course of study and to increase the trustworthiness of the results (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Johnson, 1997).

Before each interview the participants were provided with a written and verbal introduction. The introduction outlined the research, reassured confidentiality, and also included definitions of stress and stressors (Lazarus, 2006). Participants were reminded that

they were free to discuss any issues they felt were relevant to the topic. Informed consent was obtained and any questions were answered. The interviews lasted between 22 and 87 minutes, (M = 54.0 mins).

Data Analysis

Each interview was taped and transcribed verbatim immediately following its completion. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to ensure confidentiality throughout the analysis process. The interviews were read and reread to ensure that the researcher was fully immersed in the transcripts. Data was then analyzed through a process of inductive content analysis following the method proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Raw data meaning units were identified that represented the core stressors reported by parents. Each meaning unit was then coded into a first order thematic category or essence phrase that essentially represented a cluster of similar stressors (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This analytical process then progressed inductively to a higher thematic level (i.e., higher order themes) culminating in a final set of general dimensions that represented the phenomena of parental stress. To facilitate the comparative analysis of stage-specific parental stress, meaning units and themes were identified for each participant individually, within each category of parents, and in the overall sample. Data matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were developed for each category of parents to allow for the comparison of the data between themes. Furthermore, a frequency count of each sub-theme was also completed to provide further evidence of differences between parents' experiences.

Methodological Rigor

A number of steps were introduced to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, and their credibility and dependability in particular (Johnson, 1997). Firstly, engaging in pilot interviews (and maintaining the same interviewer throughout) helped to maximize interview consistency as well as encouraging a prolonged engagement with the parent population. The

experience of the interviewer as a player and coach also encouraged an affinity with this sub-culture. Secondly, an audit trail was consistently maintained of the analytical decisions and processes stemming from the raw data meaning units to the final interpretive dimensions. This process also aided the researcher's reflexivity in forcing them to reflect on decisions made with an eye to their personal assumptions or biases about the topic. Thirdly, all interview transcripts and a summary of the results were returned to participants for member checking and participant feedback (Cohen et al., 2001; Johnson, 1997). This allowed participants to confirm whether the transcripts and results provided an accurate and valid reflection of their experiences. Furthermore, they were provided with the opportunity to further substantiate their experiences or provide additional information. All participants confirmed their transcripts and validated the thematic frameworks. Two parents further reinforced key points that had emerged through the data analysis.

Finally, and importantly, investigator triangulation was achieved with the first author reading all of the transcripts and then independently identifying the raw data units for one third of the parent sample from each category. This process led to a 90% agreement rate with the second author's raw data interpretations. Following discussion and consensus at this stage, the first author checked the interpretive allocation of the raw data into the first order sub-themes and the labeling applied to each theme. This process of inductive verification between the two authors continued until the final general dimensions were agreed and the frequencies of stressor pertaining to each stage of development were intact and verifiable.

Results

Analysis of the interviews led to the identification of three general dimensions of parental stressors: Competition, Organizational, and Developmental. These general dimensions included 18 higher order themes, 71 first order sub-themes, and 253 raw data themes. This section will explore each general dimension and higher order theme across the

three stages. Quotes will be utilized to illustrate raw data themes with keys denoting the stage of development (i.e., Sa= Sampling; Sp=Specializing; In=Investment) alongside whether it was a mother (M) or father (F) and their number in that stage (e.g., SpM3). In addition, a frequency table illustrates the differences in stressors articulated by parents across the three stages (see Table 1).

General dimension one: Competition stressors

Analysis of the interviews extracted 66 raw data themes concerning stressors associated purely with a child's match. The subsequent general dimension, labeled 'Competition stressors' comprised eight higher order themes rendering it the most wide ranging in the study (see Figure 1).

Firstly, a number of parents cited the stress of logistical and preparatory issues prior to the match, and particularly the psychological readiness and focus of their child. Some parents noted the difficulties of seeing their child nervous, feeling pressured or not focusing on the upcoming match in the way they thought was necessary. One parent stated:

> The major stress comes from my son playing matches and there's not a lot you can do about that. You need the coach to help him stop showing disappointment and stress because then it will be less stressful for me. (SaF1).

The majority of parents identified watching matches as a stressor, with many stating it was the largest stressor they encountered (e.g. "The biggest stress for me I suppose is actually watching her play" InM2). The child's performance, behavior, and the outcome of the match were inextricably linked to this. One parent identified, "It's stressful as a parent because you always want them [your child] to do well. (SpM2)" Furthermore, parents wanted their child to be happy, and parental stress was enhanced when they saw their child distressed on court, displaying bad behavior, or expressing disappointment following a match. As one parent noted, "That's the worst when you see them get upset and you can't do anything. (SaF3)"

The stress of being powerless to do anything to help their child was exacerbated when they perceived their child to be performing below their ability. As one mother described, "It's like watching them sit a maths exam isn't it… and watching them put all the wrong answers in really. (InM5)" Additionally, this feeling of helplessness occurred in parents when their child suffered problems with their opponent. One father explained the predicament:

> I've had two or three incidents where… we had one where you can only describe it as bullying, you know my child was being bullied…being threatened aggressively on court in front of me…your powerless as a parents…it's not my job to do anything. (SpF1)

Many aspects relating to opponents and other parents were expressed as stressors, with extensive examples being provided. Their child's opponent was perceived as a stressor due to their behavior, (poor) line calls, and gamesmanship. As one mother articulated, "There was a particular boy…who was very well renowned for his absolutely horrendous tactics which dogged us for a couple of years…in some ways it taught Matthew*[1] very valuable lessons. At other times, it was absolutely beyond the pale. (InM7)" In relation to other parents, witnessing them putting pressure on their children was acknowledged by some parents as a stressor, as the following quote explores, "Parents can actually shock me because they get so angry with their children or so stressed out with their children. (SpF1)" Additionally, a number of participants cited the stress and resulting embarrassment when they felt other parents were evaluating their child's performance and behavior. As one parent highlighted, "I don't want him to do it [throw his racquet] … I think it's bad behavior, other people see, and you become embarrassed. (InM6)"

Competition stressors were identified across all three stages of sport participation, with little difference in the frequency of stressors expressed by parents. However, six of the

[1] * denotes that a pseudonym has been used

eight sub-themes were more frequently recalled by sampling parents than specializing or investment parents. The greatest variation in the recall of stressors between stages was in relation to other tennis parents, the child's opponent, and the outcome of the match.

In general, stressors associated with other parents appeared to reduce across the three stages, (all the sampling parents expressed this stressors but only 80% of investment parents did). Similarly, stressors associated with the outcome of the match were more frequently recalled by sampling parents, then specializing parents, with only half of the investment parents recounting this. Nearly all the sampling parents discussed the stressors associated with their child's reaction to a loss, and not knowing exactly what to say or do. The following quote was expressed throughout the sampling stage:

> It's when you want to talk on the way home that gets stressful, that's the worst, the journey home after is the stressful part. If they've had a good day it's not a problem because they want to talk about everything they've done.... when they've had a bad day they don't want to talk about it and I don't know what to say. (SaF3)

On the other hand, all investment stage parents, 83% of the specializing stage and only 67% of the sampling parents recalled their child's opponent as a stressor.

In the sampling stage, competition stressors appeared to be enhanced due to the age of the children, as one father explained, "I think maybe [I need to have] experienced more of this … I'm hoping that the younger age, because kids are still misbehaving and cheating and parents are interfering, [is more stressful]. (SaF2)" Furthermore, parents appeared new to the situations and to the process of coping with the stressors they experience. Some specializing and investment parents acknowledged that competitive stressors still exist, however, many explained that they used to be far worse. The following quote summarizes such sentiments, "I think things have changed. … I think when you first start out and you think 'what's all this about?' and then you probably become more stressed, but then you deal with it [and] it

becomes less stressful perhaps. (SpF1)" Similar thoughts were repeated by another parent who stated, "I think when we first started I watched every point and was quite conscious of where things were going. Now I try to be a little bit more laid back about it. (InM8)"

Nevertheless, in both the specializing and investment stage, a small number of parents perceived competition stressors to be greater than in the sampling stage because of the increasing importance of match outcomes. One parent highlighted, "As kids tend to get better the parents sort of become more involved and perhaps expectations get raised and it becomes more stressful the better they get. (InF2)" Similar feelings were recalled in relation to opponents because the impact of poor line calls may have greater implications than they did at a younger age (e.g., on international selection).

General dimension two: Organizational stressors

One hundred and thirty seven raw data themes emerged in relation to organizational issues These were characterized by stressors that parents perceived in relation to the logistical environment and tennis systems within which they themselves operate. The general dimension labeled 'Organizational stressors' encompassed six higher order themes and related directly or indirectly to the Lawn Tennis Association (the national governing body for British Tennis) and the structure of British Tennis (see Figure 2).

All of the participants recalled time as a stressor. The day-to-day time requirements and organization required to enable participation and progression in tennis was perceived as a notable stressor due to the impact it has upon a parent's general lifestyle. One mother recounted:

> I think probably you get so tired sometimes when you are just doing all the traveling, all the training, running a home, and all the other stuff with other members of the family as well on top of everything else …you feel a bit stressed out then. (InM5)

Furthermore, as one father stated, “That is my life: work, tennis, bed! (SaF1)” Parents with other children described feelings of guilt and worry as stressors that arise because of the unequal time they spend with one child compared to other siblings. As one mother said, “You know at some point you will be reminded that you’ve spent 10 weekends in a row going to one child’s tournaments. (InM8)”

Investment stage parents whose children live away from home at tennis academies acknowledged that time as a stressor was far reduced. Whilst time stressors still exist relating to tournaments, the day-to-day time requirements were less. As one mother stated “I don’t feel I have [stress] now because she’s away on a day to day basis. (InM5)”

Many parents in the specializing and investment stages recalled extensive financial stressors. Parents in the sampling stage estimated costs between £2,000 and £3,500 a year on tennis. However, in the specializing and investment stage this appeared to increase enormously. As one mother stated, “It just spirals out of control. (InM3)” Parents with children in the investment stage estimated spending between £15,000 and £20,000 per year on tennis. One family declared, “We have been broke for eight years and that’s no exaggeration. (InF1)” Another mother divulged, “I’ve already re-mortgaged twice and I’m thinking I might have to do it again. (InM6)”

Due to the financial demands of tennis, parents often seek to obtain sponsorship when their children are in or moving towards the investment stage. The stressors related to obtaining sponsorship were experienced in contrasting ways. The following quotes highlight two examples: a) “It is very very difficult with sponsorship because most companies do not want to sponsor individuals they want to sponsor teams. (InM6)”; b) “I run sponsorship deals… So I personally have additional stressors that some of the other parents don’t have to endure... I have a commitment obviously to the sponsors in terms of what they want back out of the deal. (SpF1)”

Allocation of funding was particularly pertinent to parents with players in the later two stages and was one of many stressors parents expressed in relation to the National and County Lawn Tennis Association. Parents perceived the lack of transparency of funding as a stressor. As one mother highlighted, "It's not transparent so you're not sure whether… you're getting your correct allocation of funding support. (InM4)" Consequently, stressors relating to perceived favoritism emerged:

> It used to be very unequal, how they would deal with players, offering opportunities around… You could see that a group of four, right at the top, would get everything and that little trailing group [would get nothing]. It wasn't spread widely enough across. (InM3)

The most substantial stressor that parents recounted, across all three stages, in relation to the Lawn Tennis Association was a lack of information, support and guidance. Parents with children in the sampling and specializing stages were unaware of the best course of action to help their child progress. As one mother highlighted, "There are people in positions [of power] that oversee who could say, '[your child] shouldn't be there now, move on'. But they're not prepared to do that openly. (SpM1)" The lack of information and guidance also led to stressors arising in the investment stage, as one father explained, "International tournaments abroad are quite stressful in getting those organized. There's not enough help really from the LTA in that respect. (InF3)"

Beyond the lack of information, parents professed a lack of respect from the Lawn Tennis Association and coaches. This promoted both frustration and ill-feeling, as the following quote summarizes:

> You don't get informed. They [national coaches] look at you, you know, you send your child off on these [national training] camps somewhere and when

you say “Can you give me some feedback?”… “What you - the parent?!, What right have you got to know? Oh no no no, we’ll tell the coach. (SpF1)”

Stressors perceived to be associated with the Lawn Tennis Association were not limited to funding, information, and coaches. However these were far more frequently recalled than other issues. Two further organizational issues that arose were injury and tournaments, both with increasing frequency in the specializing and investment stage. The lack of support provided for injured players was highlighted as a stressor by a number of investment parents, as the following quote highlights:

My son was injured and we were given no advice from the LTA. We had to find a physio and do it all ourselves. The LTA then requested he played in a tournament, against the physio’s advice…when he returned [to competition] they wouldn’t give him a wild card into an event, he had to qualify in pain and reinjured himself. You know it’s just ridiculous. (InM4)

Furthermore, injury was a long-term concern for parents, as one mother recounted:

She went through a phase when she had a lot of injuries and that does worry me for the long term. I think they have wonderfully healthy heart and lungs, but I do worry about their joints, they are going to suffer when they are older. (SpM4)

Tournament stressors included organization, traveling, accommodation, and location. Specifically, the location of the British Nationals in the summer caused problems for many parents in the specializing and investment stages. As one mother explained:

Bournemouth in August, let’s face it, that is the most crazy place to go for something like the Nationals when you may not even know that you are going [to be accepted into the draw] right until the last minute. (InM6)

Parents were also aggravated by the altered weekend tournament structure and the subsequent impact this has on accommodation and finance amongst other aspects:

> If you don't win on the first day you go home. When we go away we stay at Travel Inn's and Travelodge's. They used to have a cancellation policy where you could cancel up to 4pm. But now it's 1pm! Well, you've often not even gone on court for your second match by then so you could pay hundreds of pounds on accommodation…and then the rooms aren't used. (InM4)

General dimension three: Developmental stressors

Fifty raw data themes reflected the stressors that parents experience associated with their child's development. From these, four higher order themes comprised the general dimension labeled, 'Developmental stressors' (see Figure 3). Parents with children in the sampling stage recalled developmental stressors very infrequently. Parents indicated that this was due to their child's age and recent introduction and commitment to tennis. Parents with children in the specializing and investment stage, however, regularly recalled developmental stressors.

The most commonly identified developmental stressor was education. No parents in the sampling stage identified education as a stressor. In contrast, the majority of parents in the other two stages did. As one investment parent explained, "The decisions regarding education are huge. (InM4)". Education appeared to be a greater stressor for parents who perceived their child was academically able and those who placed great importance on education for their child's future achievement. Issues regarding education were exacerbated for some parents due to a lack of support from their child's school. The following quote encapsulates such stressors:

> I did fight very hard for them to understand that he needed to come out of school, he needed to miss lessons…the headmistress just didn't understand and the local authority who had to give permission…they didn't understand either. (InM6)

Additionally, the majority of parents in the specializing and investment stage identified stressors in relation to their child's future. Parents in the sampling stage generally did not recognize this as a stressor. However, one parent expressed stressors regarding future financial costs of tennis involvement, "I mean if he was to go to Newquay and win the area tournament they'd say "right, next week Leeds"… I'm pretty sure we wouldn't be able to do that. (SaF3)"

Parents in the specializing stage recalled the future as a stressor more regularly than parents in the investment stage. Parents in the specializing stage were unsure what their child wished to achieve in tennis, or were concerned that they had high aspirations that were unlikely to be fulfilled. As one parent commented, "He's at a point now where I think he's got to be realistic that he's probably not going to be making a living from it [tennis]… But I'm not brave enough to tell him that. (SpM1)" Such thoughts were confirmed by another mother, who explained, "It does concern me because he has high hopes, and at the same time, you've got to be realistic because there are so few that make it. (InM6)" In comparison, some parents in the investment stage took a more carefree approach to the future, for example, one parent acknowledged, "Things will change, but we just take a little chunk at a time. (InM4)" However, for many investment parents the future was perceived as a large stressor because it was more immediate and perceived to be of huge importance.

The third theme that emerged relating to developmental stressors was making decisions necessary to enable their child's progression. Again, this was recalled only once in the sampling stage, with the parent acknowledging, "It's the not knowing what's around the corner and where to go next. (SaM1)" In the specializing stage, this stressor appeared more often. For parents of players in the investment stage decision-making remained a worry and this was particularly evident in relation to decisions to let children go to residential tennis academies.

Over the three stages, a small number of parents acknowledged issues relating to other sports or hobbies. However, in the early stages most children were able to participate as they wished in other sports without additional stress. As they progress through the stages, parents identified that other sports stopped.

Discussion

Stress is widely acknowledged as an inherent part of competitive sport and continues to receive extensive research attention amongst athletes (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Hanton et al., 2005; Holt & Hogg. 2004). This is ostensibly due to the role that the stress process plays in the performance and psychological well-being of athletes. However , as noted by Harwood and Knight (2008), if the realm of youth sport seeks to optimize the role of sport parents, then there is a premium placed on understanding the inherent stressors that may impact on the quality of their role with the child-athlete (see Gould et al., 2006, 2008). Therefore, in advancing upon the research by Harwood and Knight, the aim of this study was to investigate role-related parental stressors with more precise attention to three different stages of athlete development (Côté, 1999).

From a conceptual perspective, researchers in the sport domain have started to make the distinction between those stressors linked specifically to competition and competitive performance (i.e., competition stress) with the stressors associated primarily and directly with the organization within which the individual is operating (i.e., organizational stress; Hanton, et al., 2005; Hanton & Fletcher, 2005; Woodman & Hardy, 2001). The overall results of this study suggest that such dimensions of stress apply to sport-parent roles, and that parents' experiences of stress in youth sport can be viewed through the lens offered by Hanton and Fletcher's (2005) conceptualisation of organizational stress. By adapting Cooper, Dewe and O'Driscoll's (2001) work in an organizational setting, Hanton and Fletcher (2005) forwarded five dimensions of organizational stressor in sport: factors intrinsic to the sport; roles in the

sport organization; sport relationships and interpersonal demands; organizational structure and climate of the sport; and athletic career and performance development issues.

Factors intrinsic to the sport of tennis including stressors associated with time, finances, travel, accommodation, training, injury and tournament schedules were particularly prominent amongst specialising and investment stage parents (Kirk et al., 1997a; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). The time commitment required from tennis parents has been identified to increase as children moved from the sampling stage to the specializing stage and then decrease as parents take a step back during the investment stage (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). This pattern was largely supported in the current study. Parents in the specializing stage experienced greater time and family-related stressors than those in the sampling stage due to the increase in training and competition load. Investment parents with the highest standard children who lived away from home at academies acknowledged reduced time stress compared to their previous specializing phase because of the lesser 'everyday' burden of their child's regime at home.

Specializing parents also tended to report greater sport-family role conflict where the role pressures of being a tennis parent conflicted with other family activities and responsibilities (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Yet it was clear that a number of these later stage parents felt a systematic lack of respect and communication from the national governing body and coaches in terms of acknowledging their role in the organization of their child's tennis experience. The vast majority of parents disclosed stressors associated with sport relationships and interpersonal demands, mainly related to other tennis parents or to their own child with respect to negative behaviors or dealing with the outcome of competitive matches. Additionally, it was the specializing and investment parents who highlighted the greatest stressors with respect to the organizational structure and climate of the sport. Issues related to the transparency and equality of player funding, favoritism, tournament structures, injury

considerations, and the ratings system correlated with the increasing standard, time, and investment that characterized the parent's and child's inputs and outputs.

Finally, the developmental stressors that emerged for parents in the present study were closely representative of longer term concerns linked to the athlete career and performance development dimension of organizational stress (Hanton & Fletcher, 2005). As Rotella and Bunker (1987) acknowledge, "Parents of children who make a serious commitment to sport face a difficult challenge: to raise a happy, healthy, and successful child" (p. 15). When parents reached the specializing stage (and beyond), they appeared to enter a phase of conflict, worry, and uncertainty around their child's education, their tennis development and future prospects related to both domains. Sidebottom (2001) notes the stress experienced by parents in relation to their expectation for their children to achieve. For child-athletes such achievements may be in relation to both sporting and academic success, with parents needing information and support on the most appropriate decisions and pathways. Parents in the current sample worried about making incorrect decisions regarding their child's academic or tennis future and felt enormous pressure to follow either the academic or tennis route and hope that their child was successful in this. Parents with children in the sampling stage generally perceived that such decisions were not pertinent at this time, and consequently experienced far less developmental stress.

Whilst it was apparent through the interviews that parents in the latter two stages encountered a greater range of organizational and developmental stressors, it was the sampling stage parents who appeared particularly susceptible to the varying competition stressors.

During the sampling stage the focus is upon fun and deliberate play (Côtè & Hay, 2002), with a limited emphasis upon competition. As such, one may anticipate that competition stressors are minimal during this stage. However, even at the earliest stages of

participation, tennis players are encouraged to engage in competitions to supplement their training. Whilst tournaments for children at this stage are supposed to be relaxed and often team-based affairs, there are several factors inherent to tennis that fuel emotions and negate temperance. The scoring system immediately punishes individual mistakes and brutally exposes the competence of players in a highly public and evaluative manner. Moreover, tennis is one of the few sports where players officiate themselves and young players are responsible for calling their own lines and keeping score. These competition demands offer many emotional challenges for young parents who essentially seek both a psychologically safe and fair environment for their child. These stressors include unsporting opponent behaviors, the evaluations of other parents and their potential match interference, the performance and behavior of their own child, and their helplessness in being unable to intervene and assist. For sampling stage parents, these were their first experiences of watching tennis competitions and it was clear through the interviews that many found this to be a highly stressful experience.

Ostensibly, as some investment parents noted, coping with these competition demands comes with experience and there were some parents in these later stages who acknowledged better coping mechanisms with respect to some of these competition stressors. Nevertheless, the specializing and investment stage are both associated with an increase in competition (Côtè & Hay, 2002), thus the opportunities for athletes and parents to experience disappointment and encounter stressors are enhanced. A number of parents indicated that they had been unable to develop resources to cope with these stressors despite their past experience. Indeed, the competition stressors associated with watching matches, other parents' and opponents' behaviors, and their child's attitude and behavior were consistently prevalent across stages. There are many pertinent explanations for this.

Firstly, as athletes progress, the financial, time, and emotional investment from parents and athletes themselves increases in parallel (cf. Gould et al., 2008; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Competitive matches carry more important and meaningful consequences; positive behavioral expectations are greater for all concerned as is the demand for accuracy and fairness in terms of line calling. Additionally, in the absence of coaches at tournaments, it is parents who are the sole providers of preparation and support before, during, and after matches. Independent of a child's age or standard, all parents identify with their children and want them to be happy and successful (Rotella & Bunker, 1987; Smoll, 2001). Consequently, within this integral support role at competitions, any situation that may cause children distress or disappointment is likely to be difficult and potentially stressful for parents. In addition, Coakley (2006) observed that children's sporting excellence is often attributed to parents, especially fathers and in this sample some parents disclosed the stress associated with preserving their own public image and avoiding embarrassment through their child's on court behavior (see Gould et al., 2008).

In summary, whilst a number of stressors were consistently recalled across all stages of participation (Côté, 1999), there were certain competition, organizational, and developmental stressors that were more prevalent at specific stages. It is worth reinforcing that the overall findings corroborated the survey-based results of Harwood and Knight (2008). In their study, before, during, and after match stressors associated with their child's behavior, the opponent, other parents, and their own expectations were also foremost issues . Finance, time, family, and other organizational issues were prominent, as were developmental concerns related to educational and future tennis transitions. However, the current study offers a closer appreciation of the key stressors and needs of parents as their child progresses from one stage to the next.

Limitations and implications

There are a number of limitations and future directions that are important to acknowledge in this study, as well as practical implications for sport psychologists, coaches, and governing body organizations. Firstly, the allocation of children (and thus parents) to stages was based on the characteristics of each stage (Côté, 1999), as opposed to a specified age range. Thus, the specializing and investment stage incorporated a wide range of ages, whereas the sampling stage included only children aged 9-11. Consequently, the stressors experienced by parents may have been affected by the age of the child in addition to their stage of tennis participation. In addition, the use of historical recall interviews with parents who have been through the full system, in combination with these stage-specific interviews may have provided further credibility to the results as a form of method triangulation. This additional data may have substantiated the subjective perceptions of parents at each stage and reinforced the prevalence of certain stressors more commonly shared by parents at different time points. However, it is fair to note that investment stage parents who had naturally 'lived through' the other two stages validated the overall results and insights during their member check.

It is also appropriate to recognize that the study did not intentionally examine psychological strain, or the methods of coping that parents employed to deal with the stressors that they encountered (Lazarus, 2006). Whilst the interviews illustrated how some parents lacked the resources to deal with particular stressors, and subsequently experienced negative emotions, it would be worthwhile if future research paid closer attention to the full stress and coping process in sport parents. For example, it would be interesting to investigate strain from a quantitative perspective by examining the severity or frequency of parents' negative responses to a particular stressor. Secondly, accessing sport parents who have progressed through the full talent development journey might enable a valuable investigation into parental methods of coping with competition, organizational, and developmental stressors. It

would be worthwhile ascertaining whether parents who demonstrate successful coping mechanisms and experience less stress and strain actually place less pressure upon their children and influence the psychological development of their child in adaptive manners (Gould et al., 2008). Such studies would continue to ameliorate the scientific knowledge base of 'sport-parent' stress and coping and enable parents to be more effective in their roles as provider, interpreter and role-model (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004).

Various practical implications can be drawn from this study that are of central importance to practitioners, coaches, parents, and sporting organizations. Firstly, there is a need to educate and empathize with all parents in relation to the psychological and emotional demands of competition with a view to ensuring that they have the necessary cognitive, behavioral, and motivational skills both to manage themselves and to influence the responses of their child (Gould et al., 2008). This is a particularly important educational initiative for sampling stage parents who are new to the sport and less aware of those factors that can potentially make tennis an unpleasant early experience for child and parent. The provision of materials or induction workshops at local tournaments for young parents would facilitate this goal (see USTA, 2006). However, as competition frequency and standards increase into the specializing and investment stages, this parent education needs to be maintained and tailored towards the parent who experiences those stressors more associated with match outcomes and expectations about their child's performance.

Secondly, stage-specific stressors are likely to be reduced if parents of talented athletes possess an advanced awareness of the financial, time, family, and education-related issues that they may face as their child progresses through the sport. Parental perceptions of the national governing body in relation to the respect they receive may be improved if greater communication of feedback and information is provided. For specializing parents this might include guidance on sponsorship and funding as well as preparatory information to assist

parents in their decision making about education, academies, and training program requirements in readiness for any transition to the investment stage. Some of this work might be the responsibility of their child's coach both in empathizing with logistical, family demands, ensuring regular feedback, and advising parents with honesty and clarity on player development options. Such initiatives are likely to enhance the roles, well-being, and stress management of tennis parents and it is worth noting that the Lawn Tennis Association has begun to disseminate this work throughout its organization and on their Level 5 coaching qualification.

Conclusion

This study enabled British parents to articulate the stressors that they experienced in their role as an integral supporter of their child's tennis development. While parents with children in the sampling stage encountered fewer overall stressors than those with children in the later two stages, early competition stressors were highly prominent. Specializing stage parents shared the most stressors, presenting united perceptions of organizational issues such as finance and time, as well as developmental concerns surrounding education and future decision making. Many of these competition, organizational and developmental stressors remained for parents in the investment stage. However, with greater experience of matches and tournaments, and children residing away from home, some of these stressors were reduced. The findings highlight the importance of not only supporting the roles of the sport-parent, but empathizing with their demands and needs in terms of their effective execution of such roles. In this respect, we may begin to optimize a child's sport experience and development in conjunction with the work of coaches and governing body organizations.

Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank the Lawn Tennis Association for supporting this project and members of the LTA Coaching Department and County Associations for their logistical assistance.

References

Balyi, I. (2000). Sport system building and long term athlete development in British Columbia. Canada: SportsMed BC. Retrieved January 2006, from: http://www.sportdevelopment.org.uk/balyibc2001.pdf

Baxter-Jones, A.D., & Maffuli, N. (2003). Parental influence on sport participation in elite young athletes. *The Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness, 43,* 250-255.

Bloom, B. (1985). *Developing talent in young people.* New York: Ballantine Books.

Brustad, R.J. (1996). Parental and peer influence on children's psychological development through sport. In F.L. Smoll, & R.E. Smith (Eds.), *Children and youth in sport: A biopsychosocial perpective* (pp.112-124). Madison, WI: Brown and Benchmark.

Coakley, J. (2006). The good father: Parental expectations and youth sport. *Leisure Studies, 25,* 153-163.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2001). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London: Routledge.

Cooper, C. L., Dewe, P. J., and O'Driscoll, M. P. (2001). *Organizational stress: A review and critique of theory, research, and applications*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Côtè, J. (1999). The influence of the family in the development of talent in sport. *The Sport Psychologist, 13,* 395- 417.

Côtè, J., & Hay, J. (2002). Children's involvement in sport: A developmental perspective. In J.M. Silva, & D.E. Stevens (Eds.), *Psychological foundations of sport* (pp. 484-502). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Denzin., N.K., & Lincoln., Y.S. (2005). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd Edition). Sage: London.

DeFrancesco, C., & Johnson, P. (1997). Athlete and parent perception in junior tennis. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 20,* 29-36.

Durand-Bush, N., Salmela, J.H., & Thompson, K.A. (2005). *The role of parents in the development and maintenance of expertise in sport*. Paper presented at the ISSP 11th World Congress of Sport Psychology, Australia.

Fredricks, J.A., & Eccles, J.S. (2004). Parental influences on youth involvement in sports. In M.R.Weiss (Ed.), Developmental sport and exercise psychology: A lifespan perspective. (pp. 145-164). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.

Giacobbi, P., Foore, B. & Weinberg, R. (2004). Broken clubs and expletives: The sources of stress and coping responses of skilled and moderately skilled golfers. *Journal of applied sport psychology*. **16,** 166-182.

Gould, D., Eklund, R.C., & Jackson, S.A. (1993). Coping strategies used by US Olympic wrestlers. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, **64**, 453-468.

Gould, D., Lauer, L., Rolo, C., Jannes, C., & Pennisi, N. (2006). Understanding the role parents play in tennis success: a national survey of junior tennis coaches. *British Journal of Sports Medicine, 40,* 632-636.

Gould, D., Lauer, L., Rolo, C., Jannes, C., & Pennisi, N. (2008). The role of parents in tennis success: Focus group interviews with junior coaches. *The Sport Psychologist. 22,* 18-37.

Gould, D., & Weinberg, R. (1985). Sources of worry in successful and less successful intercollegiate wrestlers. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 8,* 115-127.

Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review, 10,* 76–88.

Hanton, S., & Fletcher, D. (2005). Organizational stress in competitive sport: More than we bargained for? *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, *36,* 273-283.

Hanton, S., Fletcher, D., & Coughlan, G. (2005). Stress in elite sport performers: A comparative study of competitive and organizational stressors. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, *23*, 1129-1141.

Harwood, C.G., & Knight, C.J. (2008). Understanding parental stress: An investigation of British tennis parents. *Manuscript under review.*

Hellstedt, J.C. (1987). The parent/coach/athlete relationship. *The Sport Psychologist, 1,* 151-160.

Hellstedt, J.C. (1990). Early adolescent perceptions of parental pressure in the sport environment. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 13,* 135-144.

Holt, N.L., & Hogg, J.M. (2002). Perceptions of stress and coping during preparations for the 1999 women's soccer world cup finals. *The Sport Psychologist, 16,* 251-271.

Johnson, B. R. (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education, 118,* 282-292.

Kelley, B.C., & Gill, D.L. (1993). An examination of personal/situational variables, stress appraisal, and burnout in collegiate teacher-coaches. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 64,* 94-102.

Kirk, D., Carlson, T., O'Connor, A., Burke, P., Davis, K., & Glover, S. (1997a). The economic impact on families of children's participation in junior sport. *Australian Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport, 29,* 27-33.

Kirk, D., O'Connor, A., Carlson, T., Burke, P., Davis, K., & Glover, S. (1997b). Time commitments in junior sport: Social consequences for participants and their families. *European Journal of Physical Education, 2,* 51-73.

Lazarus, R.S., (2006). *Stress and Emotion: A new synthesis.* New York: Springer.

Leff, S.S., & Hoyle, R.H. (1995). Young athlete's perceptions of parental support and pressure. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 24,* 187-203.

Lichfield, J. (2006, March 10). Obsessive father jailed for tennis player's death. *The Independent,* p. 22.

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide.* Lewes, UK: Falmer.

Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis.* London: Sage.

Rotella, R.J., & Bunker, L.K. (1987). *Parenting your superstar*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Sidebottom, P. (2001). Culture, stress and the parent-child relationship: A qualitative study of parents' perceptions of parenting. *Child: Care, Health and Development, 27*, 1-18.

Smoll, F.L. (2001). Enhancing coach-parent relationships in youth sports: Increasing harmony and minimizing hassle. In J.M.Williams (Ed.), *Applied sport psychology: Personal growth to peak performance* (4th ed., pp.192-206). New York: McGraw Hill.

USTA (2006). Recommended guidelines for successful junior tennis parenting. Available:www.playerdevelopment.usta.com/content/fullstory.sps?iNewsid=146001&ityp e=7417. Retrieved: March, 10th, 2008.

Wolfenden, L.E., & Holt, N.L. (2005). Talent development in elite junior tennis: Perceptions of players, parents and coaches. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 17*, 108-126.

Woodman, T., & Hardy, L. (2001). A case study of organizational stress in elite sport. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 13,* 207-238.

Wuerth, S., Lee, M.J., & Alfermann, D. (2004). Parental involvement and athletes' career in youth sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 5*, 21-33.

Wylleman, P., & Lavallee, D. (2004). A developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes. In M.R.Weiss (Ed.), *Developmental sport and exercise psychology: A lifespan perspective* (pp. 503-524). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology, Inc.

Table 1 *Frequency of stressors recalled across the stages.*

General Dimension	Higher order themes	Sampling	Specializing	Investment
Competition				
	Having to watch matches	66.7%	83.3%	80%
	Other tennis parents	100%	83.3%	80%
	Child's behavior and attitude	100%	83.3%	100%
	Child's opponent	66.7%	83.3%	100%
	Child's performance	66.7%	50%	50%
	Preparation for matches	66.7%	66.7%	60%
	Outcome of the match	83.3%	66.7%	60%
	Psychological readiness	66.7%	50%	70%
Organizational				
	Financial stressors	50%	100%	90%
	Time stressors	100%	100%	100%*
	Stressors associated with the organizing bodies	66.7%	100%	100%
	Tournament stressors	83.3%	100%	100%
	Training stressors	100%	83.3%	90%
	Stressors associated with injuries	0%	83.3%	100%
Developmental				
	Child's education	0%	83.3%	90 %
	Child's future	16.7%	83.3%	50%
	Decisions regarding tennis	16.7%	83.3%	70%
	Impact on other hobbies	0%	50%	20%

* Whilst 100% of investment parents recognized these stressors they perceived them to be reduced compared to the specializing stage.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Competition stressors

Figure 2. Organizational stressors

Figure 3. Developmental stressors

Figure 1.

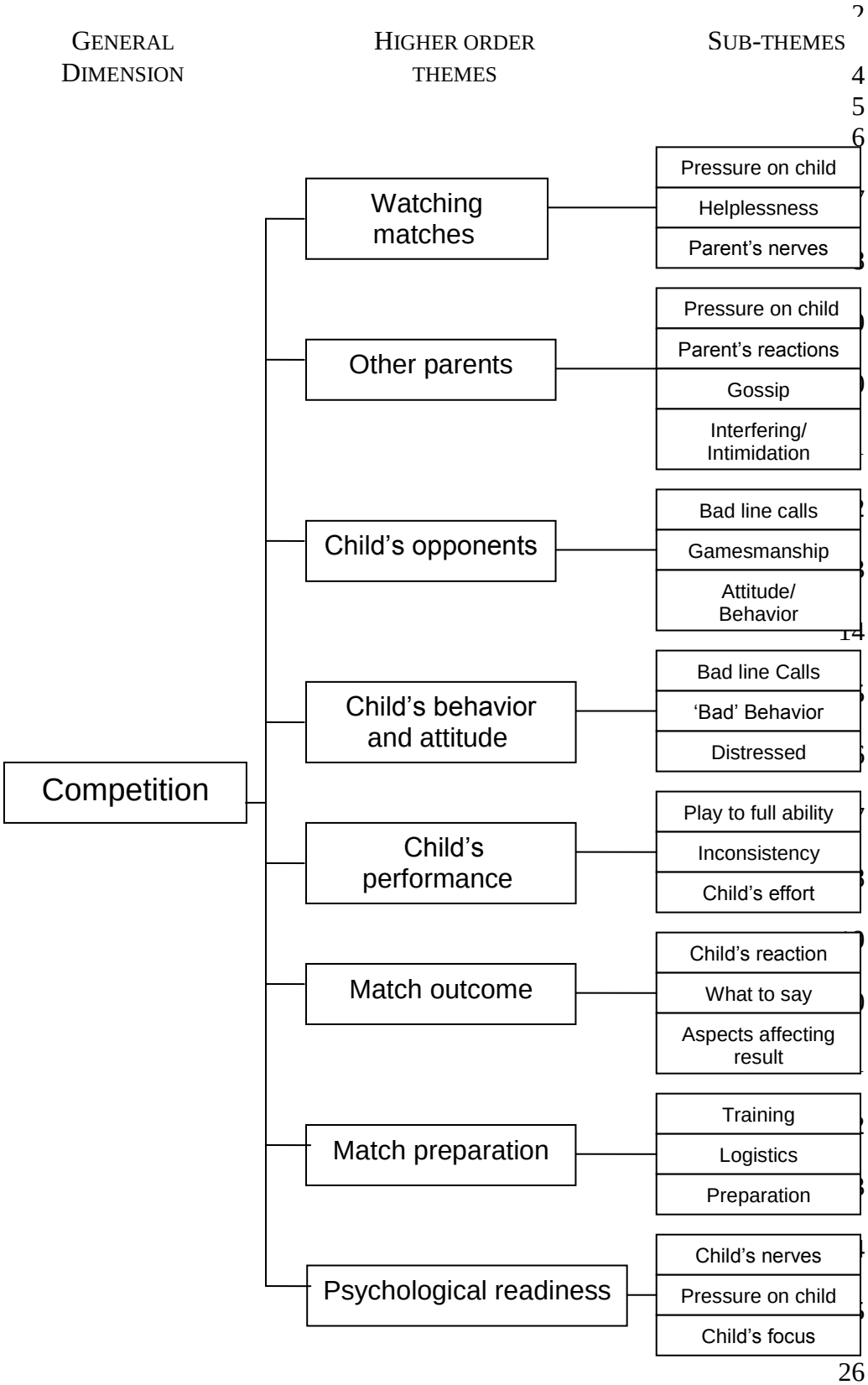

General Dimension
Higher order themes
Sub-themes
Competition
Watching matches
Pressure on child
Helplessness
Parent's nerves
Other parents
Pressure on child
Parent's reactions
Gossip
Interfering/ Intimidation
Child's opponents
Bad line calls
Gamesmanship
Attitude/ Behavior
Child's behavior and attitude
Bad line Calls
'Bad' Behavior
Distressed
Child's performance
Play to full ability
Inconsistency
Child's effort
Match outcome
Child's reaction
What to say
Aspects affecting result
Match preparation
Training
Logistics
Preparation
Psychological readiness
Child's nerves
Pressure on child
Child's focus

Figure 2

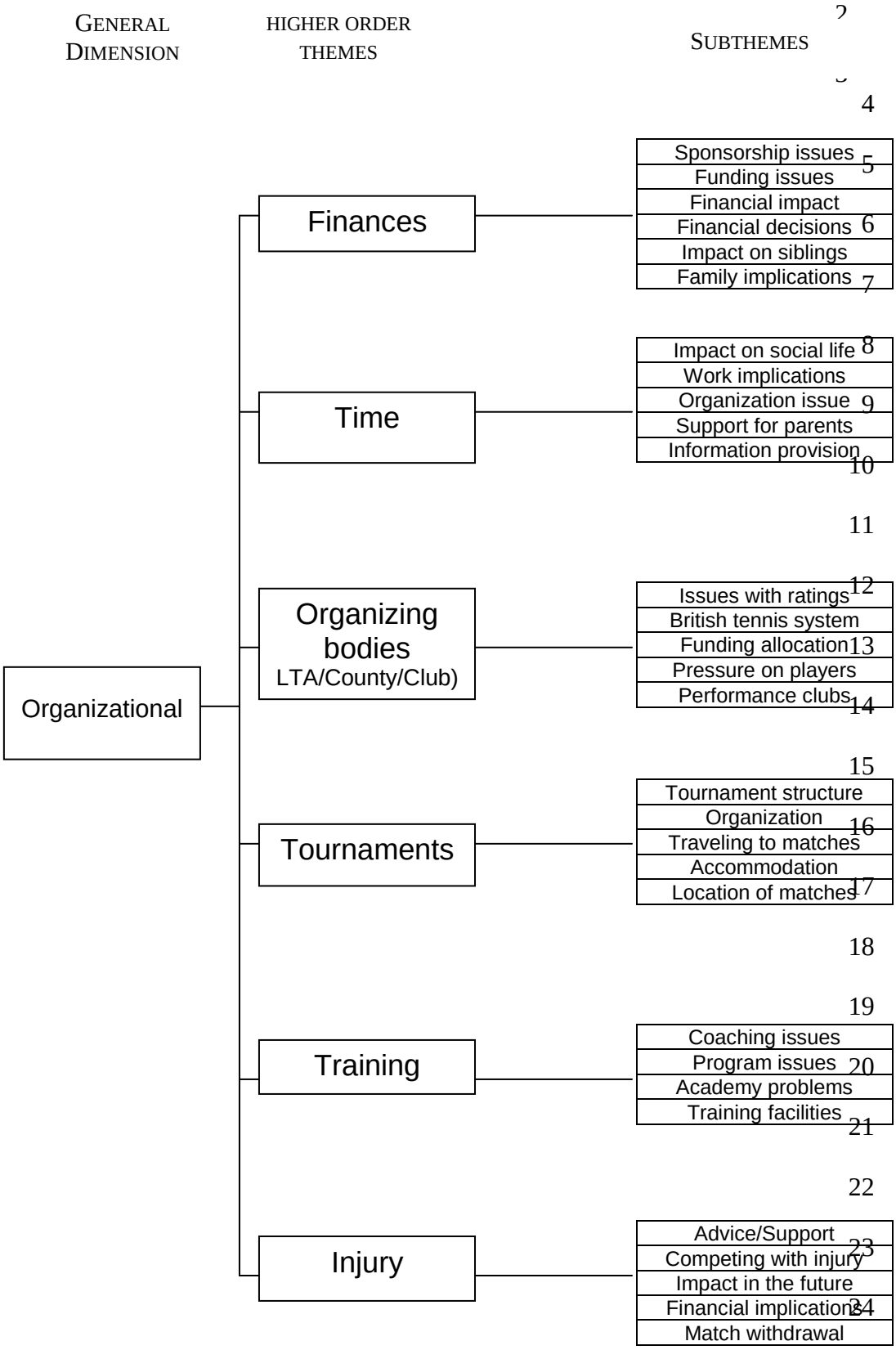
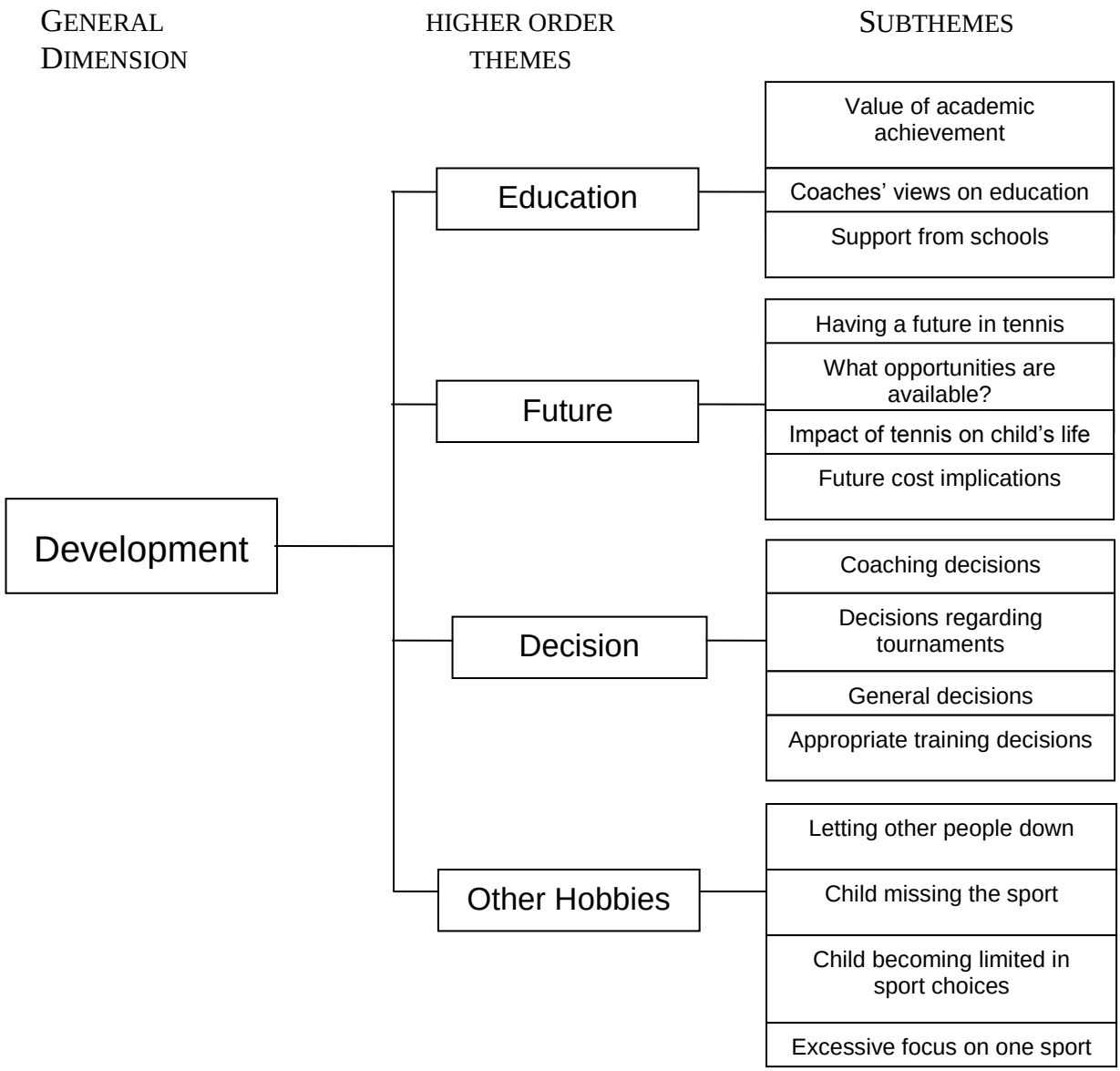

GENERAL DIMENSION
HIGHER ORDER THEMES
SUBTHEMES
Organizational
Finances
Sponsorship issues
Funding issues
Financial impact
Financial decisions
Impact on siblings
Family implications
Time
Impact on social life
Work implications
Organization issue
Support for parents
Information provision
Organizing bodies
LTA/County/Club)
Issues with ratings
British tennis system
Funding allocation
Pressure on players
Performance clubs
Tournaments
Tournament structure
Organization
Traveling to matches
Accommodation
Location of matches
Training
Coaching issues
Program issues
Academy problems
Training facilities
Injury
Advice/Support
Competing with injury
Impact in the future
Financial implications
Match withdrawal

Figure 3


GENERAL DIMENSION
HIGHER ORDER THEMES
SUBTHEMES
Development
Education
Future
Decision
Other Hobbies
Value of academic achievement
Coaches' views on education
Support from schools
Having a future in tennis
What opportunities are available?
Impact of tennis on child's life
Future cost implications
Coaching decisions
Decisions regarding tournaments
General decisions
Appropriate training decisions
Letting other people down
Child missing the sport
Child becoming limited in sport choices
Excessive focus on one sport