EXPLORING COACHING PRACTICES IN PROFESSIONAL TENNIS COACHES

Hugh Clarke

A thesis proposal

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in the Department of Kinesiology & Physical Education

in the Faculty of Education

McGill University

August 14, 2024

Abstract

Tennis is one of the most popular sports in the world, attracting more than one billion fans and accruing nearly $700 million in media revenue (Association of Tennis Professionals, 2021). Despite this glamorous view surrounding many of the top male athletes, professional tennis players are faced with numerous challenges, such as constant travel, social isolation, and income that is highly dependent on successful match results (Shrom et al., 2022). While such challenges are typical for athletes (Lyle, 2002), recent empirical advances have also identified that professional coaches are under pressure to deliver winning results, often getting fired if their teams/athletes fail to meet expectations on the field of play (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore professional tennis coaches' perspectives on their unique coaching context, and understand how — if at all — they employed holistic coaching practices to develop their athletes on and off the court. Four professional tennis coaches, all of whom were coaching a top-20 ranked ATP player at the time of the interview, participated in individual semi-structured interviews designed to draw on their personal experiences (McGannon et al., 2021). Using a reflexive thematic analysis, interviews were transcribed verbatim and arranged into codes, themes, and overarching themes (Braun et al., 2016). Results from the analysis revealed numerous challenges that coaches had to navigate, such as a lack of job stability, a unique power-dynamic with their player, an onerous tour schedule, and a lack of coaching mentors on tour. Coaches also described the coaching strategies and knowledge that they believed were instrumental to their success, both on and off the court. Off court strategies included fostering autonomy in their player, clarifying expectations from the start of their dyadic relationship, and being flexible in their overall coaching philosophy. With respect to on court strategies, coaches alluded to the importance of focusing on a player's strengths when training them, accessing new forms of information (e.g., data, videos) and professionals (e.g., biomechanics and statistics consultants) to complement their own coaching knowledge, and an evolving trend to invest more time on mentally preparing their athletes for competition. Overall, this is one of the first studies to interview such an elite sample of professional tennis coaches who explained their perceptions of coaching in professional tennis, including how they navigated unique coaching challenges and helped players succeed as a professional athlete. These results can help aspiring professional tennis coaches understand the challenges and strategies related to successfully coaching a tour player, thus informing their coaching practices. Additionally, these findings may be of use to tennis coaching organisations who have the resources to create and provide educational programs specifically for a professional tennis coaching role. Finally, these insights contribute valuable knowledge to the growing body of literature on successful coaching by revealing the common practices and beliefs of highly successful professional tennis coaches.

Résumé

Le tennis est l'un des sports les plus populaires au monde, attirant plus d'un milliard de partisans et générant près de 700 millions de dollars en revenus médiatiques (Association des professionnels du tennis, 2021). Malgré cette vision séduisante des meilleurs athlètes masculins, les joueurs de tennis professionnels sont toutefois confrontés à de nombreux défis, tels que les déplacements constants, l'isolement social et des revenus hautement dépendants des résultats de matchs (Shrom et al., 2022). Bien que de tels défis soient typiques pour les athlètes (Lyle, 2002), des avancées empiriques récentes ont également révélé que les entraîneurs professionnels ressentent de la pression afin d'obtenir des victoires, étant souvent congédiés si leur équipe et/ou athlètes ne répondent pas aux attentes sur le terrain (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Ainsi, l'objectif de cette étude était d'explorer les perspectives des entraîneurs professionnels de tennis sur leur contexte d'entraînement unique, et de comprendre si et comment ils utilisaient des pratiques d'entraînement holistiques pour développer leurs athlètes. Quatre entraîneurs professionnels de tennis coachant un joueur ATP classé dans le top 20 au moment de l'étude ont participé à des entretiens semi-structurés individuels conçus pour révéler leurs expériences personnelles (McGannon et al., 2021). En utilisant une analyse thématique réflexive, les entretiens ont été retranscrites et organisées en codes, thèmes et thèmes généraux (Braun et al., 2016). Les résultats de l'analyse ont révélé de nombreux défis auxquels les entraîneurs étaient confrontés, tels qu'un manque de stabilité d'emploi, une dynamique de pouvoir unique avec leur joueur, un calendrier contraignant et un manque de mentors. Les entraîneurs ont également décrit les stratégies et les connaissances qu'ils estimaient essentielles à leur succès, tant sur le terrain qu'en dehors. Les stratégies hors du terrain comprenaient le renforcement de l'autonomie de leur joueur, la clarification des attentes dès le début de leur relation dyadique, et la flexibilité dans leur philosophie d'entraînement. En ce qui concerne les stratégies sur le terrain, les entraîneurs ont fait allusion à l'importance de se concentrer sur les points forts du joueur lors de leur entraînement, à l'accès à de nouvelles formes d'information (par exemple, données, vidéos) et à des professionnels (par exemple, consultants en biomécanique et statistiques) pour compléter leurs propres connaissances en entraînement, et à une tendance récente d'investir plus de temps dans la préparation mentale de leurs athlètes qu'auparavant. Dans l'ensemble, il s'agit de l'une des premières études à interroger un échantillon aussi élite d'entraîneurs professionnels de tennis qui ont expliqué leur perception du coaching dans le tennis professionnel, y compris la manière dont ils gèrent les défis d'entraînement uniques et aident les joueurs à réussir en tant qu'athlète professionnel. Ces résultats peuvent aider les futures entraîneurs professionnels de tennis à comprendre les défis et les stratégies liés à l'entraînement d'un joueur en tournée, informant ainsi leurs pratiques d'entraînement. De plus, ces résultats peuvent être utiles pour les organisations d'entraînement de tennis pour créer et fournir des programmes éducatifs spécifiquement pour un rôle d'entraîneur professionnel de tennis. Enfin, ces informations contribuent à la littérature grandissante sur le coaching en révélant les pratiques et croyances communes des entraîneurs de tennis professionnels de haute performance.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for playing an important part in completing my Master of Arts degree at McGill University:

- To my supervisor, Dr. Gordon Bloom. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to pursue a master's degree and welcoming me into the McGill Sport Psychology Research Lab. You continually challenged me and helped me grow as a researcher, presenter, writer, and coach. As an international student, I also greatly appreciated the considerations you afforded me throughout this journey.
- To my committee members, Dr. Lindsay Duncan and Dr. Jordan Koch. Thank you for sharing your time and expertise throughout the process. Your attention to detail and encouraging feedback helped shape my own thinking as a researcher and greatly enhanced the overall study. And special thanks to my pseudo-committee member, Marc Glaude, who helped tremendously with this project, especially the analysis and writing of my Results.
- To the four professional tennis coaches who participated in this study. Thank you for sharing your time and rare insights. It was a joy for me to learn from some of the best tennis coaches in the world.
- To my current and former lab-mates: Danielle, Marc, Siobhan, Madison, Chrissy, Cherokee, Arantza, Petra, Christopher, Rachael, Adam, and Claudia. Thank you for all your help and support along the way. I cherish the laughs we had — especially at conferences and lab events — and I take good memories with me of dodgeball tournaments, summer spike ball sessions, and gravity disc teachings.
- To my parents, Allan and Clare. Thank you for your unwavering support in my tennis journey, which has taken me far from home for many years now. You always

encouraged me to follow my passions, and for that reason I am still playing, coaching, watching, writing, and thinking about the beautiful game of tennis.

- To my siblings, Phoebe and Toby. We don't get to see each other often, but it is always a joy when we do. Thank you for the love and support I always feel in your presence.
- To Michelle and Jean. Thank you for your support and unconditional love; coming to Quebec was easier with your warm hearts close by.
- To Fré. Thank you for your patience and support all these years. Without your gentle encouragement I may have never even started.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Over the last 50 years professional tennis has grown into a global game, aided in large part by improved air travel and satellite television (Smart, 2019). More precisely, the development of communication technology — such as radio, television, and the internet — has influenced how tennis is organised and consumed, and as a result of these technologies, tennis and its best players have become hugely popular with fans and highly profitable with brands (Smart, 2019). In fact, in a recent report from Sport Business, professional tennis ranked as the fourth most popular sport worldwide, attracting more than one billion fans and accruing nearly $700 million in media revenue (Association of Tennis Professionals [ATP], 2021). Top players, such as Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal, and Roger Federer have all eclipsed $100 million in career prize money and can afford to travel the world tour with an entourage of coaches, physiotherapists, agents, and family members. However, despite this glamorous view surrounding many of the top male athletes, the structure of the sport presents a far more challenging reality for most professional players. In fact, Shrom and colleagues (2022) recently documented several lifestyle challenges facing professional tennis players that included constant travel, social isolation, pressure to maintain ranking position, and a lack of steady income that was dependent on results. Compounding these problems, the role of a tennis coach on the professional tennis tour involves a unique power dynamic where employment and decision-making rests in the hands of the player, rather than a club or organisation (New York Tennis Magazine, 2018). Although such challenges are typical for athletes in the modern professional sporting landscape (Lyle, 2002), some researchers have identified that the coaches of professional athletes are also under pressure to deliver results, leading them to contend that coaching itself is a performance (Gould et al., 2002; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016).

While it is difficult to identify a single feature that is unique to the role of the sports coach, Lyle (2002) argued that the *process* of sports coaching was unique and required the integration and management of numerous skills and abilities: “the distinctiveness is the attempt to control or manipulate as many of the variables that affect performance as possible” (p. 73). Within the domain of professional sports, coaches play a leading role in the coach-athlete-performance relationship and are held accountable for much of an athlete’s performance (Lyle, 2002; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Specific to elite individual sports, coaches have been found to help athletes cope with stress (Gould et al., 1993), foster motivational training environments (Mallett, 2005), as well as provide feedback and support (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). With respect to tennis, the nature of professional tennis means that, in addition to their coaching duties, players often get their coaches to act as administrators: booking training facilities, getting racquets restrung, managing nutrition, finding hitting partners, dealing with parents/family members, and organising almost-weekly travel commitments (Dohme et al., 2021).

Given the time, money, and resources that are invested in the contemporary professional sports landscape, coaches are constantly under scrutiny from financiers, the media, and the fans (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Accordingly, it should be no surprise to learn that coaching at the elite level has been found to be inherently stressful (Gould et al., 2002; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Furthermore, sporting bodies have been eager to improve their recruitment methods as well as understand how to develop high performance coaches to maximise the return on their investments (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). To that end, researchers have studied a small and elite group of coaches, described as “Serial Winning Coaches” (SWCs), to better understand the nuances of their enduring success (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016, 2024). Unsurprisingly, these SWCs were found to focus on sport-specific fundamentals, recruit people who were good cultural fits, and create a culture

of discipline and healthy internal competition. Perhaps more surprising (given the high-stakes nature of their job environment), these SWCs also adopted a holistic approach to coaching by assuming an athlete-centred coaching style, placing a high emphasis on moral character development, and emphasising a sport-life balance with their athletes (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016).

Upon closer inspection, the notion of a holistic approach to coaching is not new nor incompatible with elite sporting success. John Wooden, the famous coach of the men's UCLA basketball teams throughout the 1960s and 1970s, emphasised the development of strong moral character and behaviour with his pyramid of success, as well as the use of numerous maxims, such as: "ability may get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there" (Jamison & Wooden, 1997, p. 197). Another very successful team, the New Zealand "All Blacks" in rugby, have also been paragons of a holistic approach and own one of the most successful win percentages in all of sport. Leading up to their 2011 World Cup success, the team was largely guided by the motto "better people make better All Blacks" and reflected the coaching staff's belief that high moral character required self-awareness that would, in turn, lead to better on-field performance (Hodge et al, 2014). The team also adopted a unique coach-athlete relationship dubbed the 'dual-management model' whereby decision-making was largely shared between the playing group and the coaching staff (Hodge et al., 2014).

The coach-athlete relationship itself has also been studied in high performance team sport settings (Heelis et al., 2020; Jowett, 2005; Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Pomerleau-Fontaine et al., 2023). Although the field of sports coaching has traditionally focused on the physical and technical elements of athletic performance (Miller & Kerr, 2002), more recently the coach-athlete relationship has come to be viewed as central to the athletes' overall development (Heelis et al., 2020; Jowett, 2005; Lyle, 1999; Pomerleau-Fontaine et al., 2023). As a result, the coaches' ability to cultivate effective partnerships with their athletes

has become of principal importance (Jowett, 2005). Additionally, research has shown that the development and maintenance of coach-athlete relationships is different for team versus individual sport athletes, with individual athletes rating their relationship with their coach as being both closer and more committed than their team sport peers (Bloom et al., 1998; Jowett, 2007; Rhind et al., 2012). Specific to tennis, Prapavessis and Gordon (1991) examined the compatibility of elite Canadian tennis coach-athlete dyads. A key finding was the athletes' preference for a coach who displayed democratic behaviours by sharing decision-making responsibilities and valuing player opinions regarding their tennis development; notions consistent with the tenets of holistic development (Preston et al., 2015). However, the players in Prapavessis and Gordon's (1991) study were mainly junior players and the coaches tended to work with multiple athletes, making the research more relevant to a youth sport context. To the best knowledge of the author, there is little—if any—research that has investigated the coach-athlete relationship within the context of the upper echelon of professional tennis, where the stakes are high and the lifestyle challenges amplified (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Shrom et al., 2022).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore professional tennis coaches' perspectives on their unique coaching context, and understand how – if at all – they employed holistic coaching practices to develop their athletes both on and off the court. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are some unique challenges in professional tennis that make coaching challenging?
2. How do the professional tennis coaches try to develop their players both on and off the court?

3. How do professional tennis coaches develop and maintain a strong coach-athlete relationship with their player?

Significance of the Study

While there is an extensive body of literature that has researched the traits and practices of successful coaches in a variety of team and individual professional sports (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Gould et al., 1999; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016, 2024), it appears that research on professional tennis coaches is sparse. Given the inherent lifestyle difficulties documented in professional tennis (Shrom et al., 2022), as well as the popularity and global footprint of the sport (ATP, 2021), it is surprising that this unique group of coaches have not previously been studied. The coach-athlete dyad in professional tennis is unlike any other in sports and the coach must navigate several challenges that include but are not limited to: a season that is 11 months long; a unique relationship where their athlete is essentially their employer; and a compensation that is partly dependent on the results of a single athlete (New York Tennis Magazine, 2018). This study aimed to address this gap in the literature. On a theoretical level, while numerous studies support the notion that a holistic approach by coaches can improve athletic outcomes in elite sports (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Hodge et al., 2014; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Preston et al., 2015), it was unclear how or in what ways this might happen in professional tennis. The findings of this study uncovered specific coaching practices within the professional tennis context that are holistic in nature and that can be employed by other professional tennis coaches on tour.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were identified for this study:

1. Participants had coached for at least five seasons on the ATP tour.
2. The participant's player had an ATP ranking inside the top-30 at some point during the season they were their coach.

3. The participant's player had competed in at least one grand slam in their career.
4. The participant travelled with their player on tour for at least 20 weeks of the season.
5. The participant may not be a parent or relative of the player they are coaching.

Limitations

The following limitations have been identified for this study:

1. The results may only be applicable to professional tennis coaches.
2. The results will only be reflective of the coaches' perceptions and experiences without considering the perceptions of their respective players and/or their tennis entourage.
3. The results will be limited by the coaches' ability to recall details about their past experiences.
4. The results were compiled from only four professional tennis coaches and may not be reflective of the broader professional tennis coaching population.

Operational Definitions

Coaching Effectiveness: "The consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts" (Côté & Gilbert, 2009, p. 316).

Holistic Development: "It is athlete-centred, and focuses on enhancing the athlete's self-awareness, growth, and development. As such, the coach encourages and supports athletes as they develop into authentic and valued adults" (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010, p. 310).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Sports coaching is a relatively new profession compared to some established fields, such as medicine, teaching, and law (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016, 2024). Accordingly, the scientific study of sports coaching is even younger, with a limited foundation of empirical knowledge (Campbell et al., 2022; Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). Despite this, the academic field of sports coaching has seen near-exponential growth since the turn of the century as the field broke away from its motor learning and sport psychology roots and established itself as a bona fide discipline (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). Several coaching-specific journals emerged in the 2000s as countries from outside of North America—namely, Australia, Great Britain, and Spain—began to produce research, primarily in the areas of motivation, coach education, expert coaching, and coach-athlete relationships (Campbell et al., 2022). Although coaching scholarship from the 1970s was initially dominated by a focus on observing coach behaviours in a quantitative manner, more recent research has sought an understanding of the thoughts and decision-making processes of coaches using qualitative methods, such as interviews (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004; Campbell et al., 2022). Allport (1949) was an early advocate for such a holistic approach to investigation and reasoned that knowing someone required an understanding beyond observable behaviours; knowledge of the meaning's subjects attached to their experiences was also important for researchers to grasp a more complete portrait. This shift toward a more comprehensive analysis of coaches occurred as the nature of sports coaching—one that is dynamic, social, ambiguous, and complex—was seen to require a multidisciplinary approach if the field was to capture useful information for practitioners (Campbell et al., 2022; Lyle, 2002).

While researchers had been investigating the features of effective sports coaching since at least the 1970s (e.g., Tharp & Gallimore, 1976), an accepted and often used

definition of "effective coaching" or "coaching expertise" had not been established until Côté and Gilbert's (2009) seminal paper. Recognizing that a well-defined and shared understanding of coaching effectiveness would allow the field to make better progress, Côté and Gilbert (2009) proposed a definition that integrated numerous theoretical viewpoints—such as leadership, motivation, and expertise—and that was conceptually based on the teaching, coaching, and positive psychology literature. Following a review of these intersecting fields, Côté and Gilbert (2009) distilled coaching effectiveness and expertise into three key variables. The first was defined as *coaches' knowledge.* Guided by Anderson's (1982) idea of splitting knowledge into both declarative (what you know) and procedural (what you do) domains, coaching knowledge included three core components: (a) professional knowledge, which involved the technical "how to" specific to each sport, as well as pedagogical competency, which entailed making content comprehensible and structured in a manner that would maximize development (Gilbert et al., 2010); (b) interpersonal knowledge, which recognised that coaches must be able to communicate effectively with other key stakeholders to deliver positive outcomes to their athletes. This might also encompass emotional intelligence (Gilbert & Côté, 2013); and (c) intrapersonal knowledge, which referred to the coach's understanding of oneself, their ability to leverage personal experience into an improved skillset—such as seeking help from others, reading, or using technology—and a natural disposition toward lifelong learning (Schempp et al., 2007). The second variable was defined as *athlete outcomes* which was further split into 4 C's: (a) competence—an athlete's sport-specific abilities and performance indicators; (b) confidence—defined as an internal and positive sense of self-worth; (c) connection—the social relationships that were cultivated in and out of the athlete's sport; and (d) character/caring—which involved encouraging respect for others and taking on responsibilities. The third and final variable was *coaching contexts*, which acknowledged that

different settings required different coaching styles to be effective. For example, Lyle (2002) suggested two distinct domains of coaching according to the competitive level of athletes: participation versus performance coaching. Alternatively, Côté et al. (2007) used the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP) to identify four distinct categories of coaching contexts based on the athlete stages of development; (a) sampling years—children participating early on in their sporting career; (b) recreational years—casual adult and adolescent participants; (c) specializing years—serious adolescent competitors; and (d) investment years—high performing adult and adolescent athletes. Coaching effectiveness was thus defined as follows: "The consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts" (Côté & Gilbert, 2009, p. 316).

Coaching Knowledge

Bloom's (1985) study on talent development highlighted the central role a mentor played throughout the years in nurturing world-class performance across scientific, artistic, and sporting domains. Côté and Gilbert's (2009) different types of coaching knowledge were also evident during the final years of expert performance, where Bloom (1985) found that the procedural focus of training shifted from more technical instruction to the refinement of individual style and tactical awareness. From an interpersonal lens, a reorientation in the coach-athlete relationship also occurred, whereby the interactions became more collegial and based on mutual respect, yet coaches still expected a high degree of dedication so that pupils could excel beyond their perceived limits. Similarly, a study by Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) on developing talent in teenagers found three common characteristics of successful coaches that highlighted interpersonal and intrapersonal facets: (a) an intrinsic enjoyment to their mentor role where they encouraged their athletes to continually seek improvements; (b) the implementation of an ideal learning environment that maximized the athlete's concentration

and enjoyment and led to an experience of "flow"—"the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.4); and (c) an ability to understand the needs of their athletes as well as a genuine concern and care inside and out of the athlete's sport. With respect to flow states, Csikszentmihalyi et al. (1993) also highlighted three features of coaches that improved the odds of their athletes reaching such states. First, coaches had a natural disposition to seek flow experiences themselves within the domain in question that went above and beyond their work role. Continually experiencing flow in their domain motivated the coach to find ways to bring out similar experiences for their athletes. Second, coaches eschewed extrinsic rewards, instead encouraging athletes to find intrinsic reward in the mastery of the skill itself. And third, coaches were in tune with their athletes, knowing when to praise and criticize, and accommodated for the athlete to learn at their own pace. While such facets were evident in the relatively low-pressure environments of talent development, within the context of high-performance and professional sport, coaches are accountable for results, and are responsible for channelling athletic performances on the international stage (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). This has led some researchers to consider coaching as a performance itself (Gould et al., 2002).

Given the time and money that is at stake in current high-performance and professional sporting environments (Gladden et al., 2001), as well as the chaotic and unstable tenure of many appointed professional coaching roles (Corsby et al., 2020), it is perhaps not surprising to learn that researchers have been eager to identify the coaching traits and practices that lead to the development of coaching expertise and repeated success at the elite level (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016, 2024). Specifically, research on "Serial Winning Coaches" (SWCs) has uncovered the personalities, practices, and unique career arcs of these rare individuals (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Lara-Bercial and Mallett's (2016) study

outlined four key themes that emerged following in-depth interviews with several SWCs: (a) a coaching philosophy that promoted virtuous behaviour and a holistic approach towards the athlete's career that emphasized a work/life balance; (b) an ability to carve a clear vision based on fundamentals that maximised the return on time invested; (c) the selection—and subsequent development—of staff members who were deemed a good 'fit' within the organisation; and (d) the cultivation of an environment conducive to success, which meant a culture built upon enforced high standards, a meticulous attention to detail, and the encouragement of healthy internal competition. Interestingly, when asked to point out what separated their SWCs from other coaches they had worked with, athletes often emphasized the interpersonal and intrapersonal skillsets more so than the "how to" declarative knowledge (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). Additionally, Mallett and Lara-Bercial (2016) investigated Big Five (Costa & McCrae, 2008) personality traits of SWCs and found a distinct profile emerge whereby participants were found to score low in neuroticism, high in extraversion, and high in conscientiousness. This profile painted SWCs as energetic and hardworking optimists who managed setbacks and difficulties admirably and were able to channel difficult emotions into positive action. They were adept at navigating social settings and had a natural drive and curiosity to learn (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Such a profile showcases a high degree of intrapersonal knowledge with an ability to turn self-reflection into action.

Reflection is considered highly important to the development of coaching knowledge and the improvement of pedagogical competency (Schön, 1983). In fact, some researchers consider it *the* key to experiential learning: "ten years of coaching without reflection is simply one year of coaching repeated ten times" (Gilbert & Trudel, 2006, p. 114). Schön (1983) conceptualised reflective practice as a method that practitioners used to cope with complex and unpredictable environments and described two types of reflection: (a) *reflection-on-action* involved thinking back on an experience and analysing how our current level of

professional knowledge may have led to an unexpected outcome; and (b) *reflection-in-action* involved a present-moment awareness where our decision-making could still affect the outcome of the current situation. Using Schön's (1983) work as a guide, Gilbert and Trudel (2006) synthesised their own four step *reflective conversation* for coaches that was influenced by four conditions: (a) the availability of trusted colleagues; (b) a coach's experience level, where more experienced coaches relied less on coaching material and were more likely to engage in high-level abstract thought; (c) characteristics of the problem, where more challenging problems required an earlier and more thorough reflection with others; and (d) the environment, which referred to the overall level of support in their coaching community. Similar to, but distinctly separate from reflection, *self-monitoring* has been identified as another feature of effective coaches. Self-monitoring goes beyond reflection and entails the continued implementation and modification of specific behaviours that are goal-directed (Karoly, 1993). By explicitly tracking their performance in this manner, experts that engage in self-monitoring have been shown to display a better awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. In turn, they can assess the cause of their weaknesses and take corrective action (Berliner, 1986). Schempp and colleagues (2007) investigated the self-monitoring strategies of expert golf coaches and found a range of goals and actions evident in many teaching pros. Goals included improving their communication ability and continued learning and concerned professional and personal spheres. Actions included seeking help from other experts (especially in face-to-face contexts so that topics could be covered in depth), exploring new technologies in the field, and reading to gain new information. Interestingly, reading *outside* their own domain to draw upon disparate concepts and amplify their knowledge base has been shown to be a central feature of many top performers and sports coaches (Epstein, 2019; Vallée & Bloom, 2016). Formal education—especially early in their careers—was also shown to be a core feature in the developmental pathways of most SWCs, irrespective of the chosen

field of study (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016, 2024). It provided SWCs with a latticework of mental models that helped them define clear objectives, interpret events as they unfolded, and overall accelerated their rate of on-the-job learning and eventual mastery of their craft. SWCs also valued non-formal (e.g., coaching clinics) and informal (e.g., dialogue with others, self-reflection) learning opportunities and were self-confessed fans of their own sport, often watching for pleasure in their own time (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Driving this voracious appetite for knowledge was a desire to be competent and to prove themselves in their domain (Deci & Ryan, 1985; McLean & Mallett, 2012). In this sense, learning was a never-ending process, rather than a means to an end. Further, their drive to improve themselves was also, in part, driven by a desire to improve their athletes. At the core of this dual motivation was a term Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) coined as *driven benevolence*: a persistent and directed desire to improve oneself and others, reined in by a genuine care for the overall development of people, and an acute sense that longevity at the top required balance if it was to be sustained. Accordingly, SWCs recognised that such balance was necessary, and that it could also be beneficial to their athletes' performances as well (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016).

Holistic Athlete Development

Within coaching literature, some research has specifically explored the feasibility of athlete-centred coaching approaches sometimes labeled as *holistic development* (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016, 2024; Falcão et al., 2020; Falcão et al., 2019). Holistic development is a democratic coaching style that empowers the athlete to take ownership of the development and decision-making processes within a facilitative coach-athlete relationship (Lyle, 2002; Preston et al, 2015). While no consensus definition underpins holistic development (Bloom et al., 2014), for the purpose of this study, we use the definition from Bennie and O'Connor (2010) specifically since they studied elite athletes and

coaches: “It is athlete-centred, and focuses on enhancing the athlete’s self-awareness, growth, and development. As such, the coach encourages and supports athletes as they develop into authentic and valued adults (p. 310).” These empowering principles of holistic development are rooted in Deci and Ryan’s (1985) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) on human wellness and intrinsic motivation (Preston et al., 2015). Conceptually, intrinsic motivation is expressed as an authentic desire towards specific activities that allows one to explore and master their environments in the face of unique tasks (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mallett, 2005). SDT proposes that intrinsic motivation encompasses three perceptions: (a) autonomy, or self-determination, refers to a person’s freedom of choice; (b) competence, refers to a person’s capacity to dictate the terms of their fate by means of effective actions; and (c) relatedness, refers to a sense of tribalism and belonging to a larger group (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mallett, 2005). Deci and Ryan (1985) proposed that motivation operated on a continuum, with intrinsic motivation at one end of the scale and amotivation at the other. Along the continuum there are numerous forms of extrinsic motivation— characterized by coercion and obligation— that are separated by perceived levels of self-determination (Mallett, 2005).

Research in youth sport settings has revealed several positive outcomes when holistic coaching practices have been trialled (Falcão et al., 2019; Falcão et al., 2017). For example, a study by Falcão and colleagues (2019) investigated the experiences of youth-basketball athletes who had been coached using holistic strategies. Prior to the intervention the coaches received an educational workshop on holistic coaching in four phases that involved: (a) an overarching rationale and explanation of the holistic approach to coaching; (b) a theoretical phase that drew parallels between coaching and teaching and outlined how to adapt teaching strategies to coaching in sport; (c) an applied phase that expanded on these teaching strategies used by coaches to implement holistic practices. Coaches were also assisted in developing strategies that would establish team goals, teach drills, and form team values based on

precepts of holistic development; and (d) the coaches discussed possible difficulties of incorporating holistic practices, as well as potential solutions (Falcão et al., 2019). The results of the study found that these youth athletes perceived their coaches as accepting, supportive, and worthy of trust—facets that reflect the core tenets of holistic development—and that coaches encouraged a balance between school and sport. Furthermore, the youth athletes reported that their basketball skills had improved because of the coaches, and that they experienced more enjoyment, autonomy, feelings of success, and higher motivation levels (Falcão et al., 2019). The youth athletes' descriptions of their coaches' behaviours illustrated the value of holistic development approaches in youth sport, not only for their general well-being, but for their sport performance as well. However, such an approach has also been implemented and studied at the highest levels of professional sport.

Using SDT as a framework, Mallett (2005) designed and implemented an autonomy-supported training environment for two Australian men's track relay teams in the two years leading up to the 2004 summer Olympic Games in Athens. As the coach, Mallett (2005) also adopted guidelines developed by Mageau and Vallerand's (2003) study—one steeped in athlete-centred principles—on how coaches can enhance athlete motivation using principles of athlete autonomy. The guidelines proposed that, more than just providing athletes with choices, coaches should display a dynamic set of behaviours that: (a) recognised and respected the athlete as a person, such that their views and feelings feel heard; (b) provided athletes with choices; (c) reduced authoritarian instruction and behaviours; and (d) involved athletes in the problem-solving and decision-making exercises and valued their input. As a result, Mallett (2005) outlined several examples of when he implemented autonomy-supported coaching behaviours throughout the two-year tenure: first, decisions on training times, content, and structure were negotiated with the athletes; second, facilitated discussions that asked questions and helped guide athletes to their own development of knowledge were

used during video sessions of prior races. In this example, Mallett (2005) pointed out that the focus was on the athletes learning, rather than the coaches teaching, and was pedagogically consistent with the tenets of SDT and holistic development; third, the final running order for the 4x400m relay was left to the athletes to decide following their semi-final performance (Mallett, 2005). While there was no empirical means to test the efficacy of Mallett's (2005) training environment, he did note that the relay team ran their season best times in the semi-finals and finals of the Olympic Games, beating more fancied rivals such as Jamaica, Canada, and Germany.

Mallet's (2005) study is not the only example of holistic coaching demonstrating a congruence with Olympic success. A study by Preston and colleagues (2015) interviewed a diverse sample of eight recently retired male and female Olympians who had had experience working under a coach employing holistic development practices. The athletes were from a range of individual and team sports, including one parasport athlete. Preston et al. (2015) identified five core tenets of holistic coaching that they used to guide their research, which included: (a) nurturing the development of life skills through the medium of sport, such as leadership, teamwork, and decision-making, while also encouraging outside interests in work or higher education; (b) empowering athletes in the planning and decision-making processes; (c) asking questions and guiding athletes in the learning process, rather than prescribing training items; (d) handing responsibility to the athletes to cultivate a high quality training environment and team culture; and (e) using available resources to improve performance, such as assistant coaches, soliciting outside help and feedback, and trialling new technology. Preston et al. (2015) found that the athletes' coaches exhibited holistic coaching practices to varying degrees. For example, some coaches encouraged their athletes to start thinking of life after their sport while training—an example of the first tenet—whereas other coaches went through long periods of mundane training without any emphasis on other activities (Preston

et al, 2015). Findings related to the second tenet of athlete empowerment showcased a general lack of democratic coaching behaviours, with more than half of the coaches dictating training plans with little athlete input. Similarly, the third tenet of optimal teaching was also rarely mentioned and was the least supported of the five, with few coaches employing questions to "guide" athletes. Instead, multiple athletes highlighted instances that reflected over-coaching and a need to control the situation that ultimately harmed athlete performance (Preston et al., 2015). Findings related to the fourth and fifth tenets of team culture and using resources were diverse. Preston and colleagues (2015) theorized that the overall mixed findings may have been due to a lack of coach education on holistic coaching practices as well as coaches perceiving that holistic approaches at the elite level were not compatible with great performance. Despite these results, Preston et al. (2015) noted that the athletes were advocates of the holistic elements they experienced and—perhaps most importantly—there was a trend where the most successful Olympic athletes (based on medals won at the Olympic Games and World Championships) had coaches who displayed more of the holistic coaching tenets compared to the less successful Olympic athletes. More specifically, three out of the four athletes in the study who reported their coach using almost all the holistic development tenets had won the most medals out of the eight participants, challenging the notion that holistic development is not compatible in a "win at all costs" environment like elite sport (Preston et al., 2015). Beyond the peak performances of an Olympic Games, threads of holistic development have also been at the core of one of the most successful jerseys in all of sport.

The "All Blacks" (derived from their all-black uniforms) are the national rugby union team of New Zealand. They are the most successful rugby nation in history despite their relatively small population, winning more than 75% of games from 1903 to 2021 (All Blacks, 2023). From 2004 to 2011, under the guidance of Graham Henry (head coach) and Wayne

Smith (assistant coach) the All Blacks won 85% of games and culminated in winning the 2011 Rugby World Cup (Kerr, 2015). A study by Hodge and colleagues (2014) investigated the motivational climate created by Henry and Smith during their tenure from 2004 to 2011. The case study revealed numerous themes that provided a rich and nuanced account of the side with multiple examples of holistic development. The first theme involved a critical turning point—a team drinking incident—that acted as a catalyst for a transformation in the team. Following this incident, Henry and Smith created a leadership group amongst the players that provided ownership and accountability to enhance player autonomy. From this, a "dual-management model" evolved over time, which was reflected in training decisions, game plans, and coaching opportunities being shared by both coaches and players (Hodge et al., 2014). Second, Henry and Smith transformed their own coaching behaviours, where they shifted away from an authoritarian and direct style, to one that was more collaborative with the players in decision-making and that empowered athletes by asking questions, rather than simply giving directives (Hodge et al., 2014). Over time, this dual-management model evolved into a weekly schedule, where responsibility and decision-making largely rested with the coaching staff at the beginning of the week, but gradually shifted to the player group as the team approached game day (Hodge et al., 2014). Additionally, the coaches felt they possessed an acute sense of emotional intelligence and self-awareness which made them "flexible" in their approaches; knowing when to praise, when to criticize, and when to listen, depending on the needs of the situation (Hodge et al., 2014). An example of this involved Henry's decision to stop making pre-match speeches after then captain, Tana Umaga, questioned the effectiveness of the exercise. Finally, and in line with holistic development's concern for the individual as a person, the team adopted a slogan: "better people make better All Blacks". Central to this motto was the idea that being a person of high moral character that cultivated positive relationships with teammates and other stakeholders was a direct

reflection of a player's self-awareness. In turn, greater self-awareness was believed to deliver superior on-field performances, as Smith explained: "It is a general statement, but guys who behave themselves and have high standards, are generally pretty intelligent…you've gotta have good self-awareness, and good game understanding, otherwise you just can't cut it at this level" (Hodge et al., 2014, p. 66).

The All Blacks are not a fringe case of holistic development working at the highest levels of team sport. A study by Bennie and O'Connor (2010) investigated the coaching philosophies of several highly successful Australian football and cricket coaches and found similar coaching practices. For example, the coaches often encouraged their players to pursue off-field skills—such as educational or business goals—and they tended to value learning experiences rather than outcomes, despite the intense performance context of their coaching roles (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010). Furthermore, these clubs also staffed a Welfare Manager who provided career transition assistance to their athletes to equip them for life after their professional sporting career. The Welfare Manager ran workshops on financial literacy, undertaking tertiary studies, and nutritional advice (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010). These provisions were not seen as indulgent perks to retain players at the club; it was the fundamental belief of the coaches that on field success was a result of developing players and the team as people first (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010). Similarly, a study by Bloom and Vallée (2016) also demonstrated the effectiveness of a holistic approach to coaching at the elite university level in Canada. Chantal Vallée studied some of the best coaches in Canada during her sport psychology master's program at McGill before embarking on her own university basketball coaching career. She followed the guidelines of her research as the new head coach of the Windsor Lancers Women's basketball team; a program that was ranked 41 out of 43 teams and had never hosted a playoff game upon Vallée's appointment (Vallée & Bloom, 2016). However, Vallée would go on to develop the Lancers into a powerhouse program,

eventually winning five consecutive Canadian national championships and enjoying a playoff win percentage above 80% (Vallée & Bloom, 2016). Vallée and Bloom (2016) highlighted four keys in their study that enabled Vallée to build a championship culture. First, Vallée clearly articulated a bold vision to create a new culture of excellence and established a five-year plan to execute it. Second, Vallée empowered her athletes, to the point that they could win games without relying extensively on her as their head coach. Third, Vallée committed herself to continually learn and reflect in an effort to acquire new coaching knowledge. Finally, Vallée prioritized the development of life skills in her athletes, even if it jeopardized short-term performance outcomes (e.g., sidelining star players for important games due to poor behaviour).

Focus on character development is also evident in the coaching practice of Anson Dorrance, one of soccer's most decorated coaches in North America (Silva, 2006). Dorrance coached the University of North Carolina women's soccer team to 18 collegiate national titles as well as the USA women's national team to World Cup glory in 1991 (Silva, 2006). In an interview by Silva (2006), Dorrance revealed that a methodical focus on character development was at the centre of his coaching practice at North Carolina and felt that it was instrumental in creating an enduring championship winning culture. Not content with simply assuming a general disposition toward character development, Dorrance explained how he required each of his players to memorize a curated list of eleven statements, gathered from an eclectic mix of authors and epochs, that reflected critical elements of a championship environment and were considered the "core values" of the team (Silva, 2006). Dorrance felt that memorization of such statements not only helped thread these core values into the fabric of team discussions, but that they were irrevocably stitched into the team psyche and helped shape the overall development of the players as well (Silva, 2006). Dorrance has also said that the highest honour a North Carolina women's soccer team member can receive is the

"core value award", presented to an athlete who best exemplifies the character development statements, rather than the more ability-focussed honours, such as "most valuable player" awards (Bloom, 2012). Alongside this focus on character development, Dorrance also strived to praise his athletes at every opportunity—whether inside or outside of their sporting domain—as he felt this helped create powerful bonds with his female players and strengthened the coach-athlete relationship (Silva, 2006). Mirroring this thought process, a study by Duchesne and colleagues (2011) found that six US intercollegiate soccer coaches described their relationships with their international student-athletes as "parental" and that they felt cultivating a positive coach-athlete relationship enhanced their holistic development coaching strategies. Similarly, a study by Kim et al. (2016) on eight US collegiate men's team coaches in Canada found that building trust with their first-year athletes was critical in establishing a foundation from which effective coaching could take place in subsequent years. However, beyond the collegiate sporting level, the quality of the coach-athlete relationship has also been found to play an important role in professional and Olympic athletic performance settings (Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Jowett & Meek, 2000).

Coach-Athlete Relationship

Traditionally, the field of sports coaching has often fixated on improving what are considered to be observable performance outcome measures—namely, the physical, technical, and strategic elements of athletic performance (Miller & Kerr, 2002). However, Lyle (1999) suggested that coaches who disregarded nurturing the coach-athlete relationship risked stunting the overall potential of their athletes. Jowett (2005) echoed this sentiment and proposed that the coach-athlete relationship was not simply an annex or niche topic of concern, but rather, sat at the very foundation of coaching: "Overall, the coach-athlete relationship is embedded in the dynamic and complex coaching process and provides the means by which coaches' and athletes' needs are expressed and fulfilled" (p. 412). Jowett

(2007) expressed the coach-athlete relationship as an interdependence between the athlete and coach's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, and conceptualised this relationship using a "3C's + 1" model that consisted of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation. *Closeness* entailed the affective component of the model and represented the mutual feelings of trust and respect between the coach and athlete that were a result of their shared experiences (Jowett, 2007). *Commitment* characterized the cognitive component and represented the coach and athlete's thoughts of attachment. Coach-athlete dyads with high levels of commitment tended to think in terms of "we" instead of "I" and had intentions to maintain and invest in the athletic relationship in the long-term (Jowett & Meek, 2000). *Complementarity* reflected the behavioural component and involved displays of cooperation between the athlete and coach whereby interactions included reciprocal behaviours (e.g., the coach provided instructions which the athlete then followed) and an overall collegial manner during practice sessions. The final "+1" element of the model, *co-orientation*, characterised the degree to which the coach and athlete developed a mutual understanding (via means of verbal communication) of each other's feelings, behaviours, and cognitions, which aided the dyad in establishing shared goals and behavioural expectations (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Meek, 2000). Researchers have suggested that higher levels of interdependence—represented by higher scores in each of the 3Cs components—may produce a stronger coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2007). A review of the literature demonstrates an association between higher scores in the 3Cs and several athlete outcomes, such as higher levels of satisfaction (in relation to both their athletic performance and their personal treatment), higher levels of enjoyment in their sport, and improved athletic performances (Jowett & Meek, 2000; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Pomerleau-Fontaine et al., 2023). In contrast, research has found that low levels of interdependence—characterised by a lack of trust and respect, a lack of motivation in maintaining the relationship, and a lack of collaborative actions within the

sporting domain—can lead to athlete stress or distraction, as well as poor athletic performance (Gould et al., 1999; Jowett & Meek, 2000).

While the quality of the coach-athlete relationship can influence athletes in several ways (including their athletic performance), research has uncovered differences in how coach-athlete relationships are developed and maintained between individual and team sports (Rhind et al., 2012; Bloom et al., 1998). For example, Rhind and colleagues (2012) investigated how athletes from individual and team sports rated the quality of the relationship with their coach. They found that athletes from individual sports self-reported higher levels of closeness and commitment with their coach compared to their team sport counterparts. Rhind et al. (2012) suggested that these differences may have arisen due to individual sport athletes spending more time with their coach and having greater opportunity to interact in a one-on-one manner compared to team sport athletes (Rhind et al., 2012). Additionally, individual sport athletes also felt that their coach had more trust, respect, and appreciation for them compared to team sport athletes. Overall, these results indicated that individual athletes viewed themselves as more interdependent with their coaches compared to team sport athletes (Rhind et al., 2012).

Based on these reported differences in interdependence between individual and team sport athletes, as well as a general lack of research on coach-athlete interactions in individual sports, Henderson and colleagues (2022) explored the athlete perspective of the coach-athlete interactions of six elite Canadian divers within the unique setting of a diving competition where athletes have ample opportunity to interact with their coach between dives over the course of a competition day. Henderson et al. (2022) found that the diving coaches' behaviours influenced the physical and mental performances of the divers in several ways, both positively and negatively. First, divers placed an importance on feeling supported during competitions via positive encouragement from their coach and highlighted the need for

coaches to adapt to different individuals in how they conveyed encouragement and feedback (Henderson et al., 2022). Second, divers appreciated the various ways their coach helped them achieve an ideal performance state, either by building their confidence through their own behaviours as a coach (e.g., assuming confident posture), communicating positively, or focusing their attention on fundamentals prior to a dive. Third, negative emotional displays by coaches during competitions tended to result in a lack of communication between the duo and contributed to higher levels of self-doubt in the diver (Henderson et al., 2022). Beyond coaching behaviours during competition, Henderson et al. (2022) also highlighted several interdependent components that were evident from the divers' interviews. Firstly, the divers highlighted the close bond they had developed with their coach as they spent more time together and emphasised the importance of developing trust with their coach in order to compete in a high-risk sport like diving. This aspect reflected the closeness component of Jowett's (2007) 3Cs + 1 model and suggested that coach trust aided the divers in managing the fear and doubt of performing higher dives. Additionally, the interpersonal knowledge of the coaches, where they had an acute understanding of the diver's feelings in specific moments, was also appreciated by the divers and was thought to help facilitate performances. Henderson et al. (2002) interpreted this theme to align with the co-orientation element of Jowett's (2007) model which emphasised a mutual understanding of the thoughts and feelings of the coach and athlete.

Specific to elite professional tennis, there appears to be a lack of research that has directly investigated the coach-athlete relationship, with a few exceptions that have indirectly explored this topic (i.e., Pietzsch & Watson, 2016; Zhu et al., in press). For example, Pietzsch and Watson (2016) provided a reflective observational account of the coach-athlete relationship of British tennis player Heather Watson and her strength and conditioning coach. Although this publication did not include insights from her technical tennis coach, the study

emphasised the importance of the coach establishing a close relationship with the player, particularly in the decision-making process. These aspects reflect the closeness and co-orientation elements of Jowett's (2007) 3Cs + 1 model. Similarly, a study by Zhu et al. (in press) investigated the perspectives of elite Chinese professional tennis players on their coaches' effectiveness within training and competition environments. The study described that coaches' behaviours ranged from autonomy-supportive, where coaches acted more as a guide and listened to their athletes, to controlling, where coaches were verbally abusive and acted in a manner that led to athletes doubting their athletic abilities. For example, one coach was described as being critical of other players in front of his own player, which negatively effected his own players' confidence and concentration during her own competitive matches. Almost all the Chinese tennis players preferred the autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours. Overall, the results of this study emphasised the importance of tennis coaches developing harmonious relationships with their players before, during, and after competitions; a finding consistent with the complementarity component of Jowett's (2007) 3Cs + 1 model.

Conclusion

While sports coaching research has continued to expand its scope of study into new sports and concepts, one understudied population is professional tennis coaches. Furthermore, there is scant research on the holistic development practices in professional sports, including the coach-athlete relationship, and especially in individual professional sports. Given the time, money, and resources invested in professional tennis (ATP, 2021), it would appear timely to empirically research whether holistic coaching practices exist in professional tennis. Additionally, the structure of professional tennis presents numerous unique challenges to both players and coaches that may influence the dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship and how holistic development practices are implemented by coaches (Shrom et al., 2022). To that

end, the purpose of this study was to explore professional tennis coaches' perspectives on their unique coaching context, and understand how – if at all – they employed holistic coaching practices to develop their athletes both on and off the court.

Chapter 3

Methods

Qualitative research seeks to understand the lived experiences of people and the meanings they assign to their social reality through the medium of language (Daly, 2007). This chapter will describe the qualitative methods that were used to address the research questions of this study, beginning with the researcher's philosophical assumptions, followed by the participants and qualitative methods that guided this study.

Philosophical Assumptions

In the social sciences, all forms of inquiry are based upon a collection of fundamental assumptions as to the nature of reality (*ontological assumptions*) and our relationship with knowledge (*epistemological assumptions*) (Daly, 2007; Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). The set of beliefs and assumptions that one uses influences which aspect of a phenomenon is brought into focus, and which is left unattended (Oakley, 1974). In this way, research guided by different sets of assumptions produces different kinds of information and knowledge (Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). For example, a simple demarcation between ontological assumptions is the difference between *realism* and *relativism* (Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). A realist ontology assumes that there exists an objective external world that can be accurately measured and represented and is normally employed in *quantitative research* (Daly, 2007; Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). In this manner, the realist researcher takes on the role of 'disinterested scientist' (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Conversely, a relativist ontology assumes that the perception of reality is constructed by each individual and dependent on their interpretation of the experience, resulting in multiple socially constructed realities that are conditional to time and context (Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). Accordingly, the relativist researcher assumes the role of 'passionate participant' and is typically associated with *qualitative studies* (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Logically, the ontological assumptions that a researcher adopts also inform their epistemological assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Tamminen & Poucher, 2020).

Epistemology refers to one's beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is created. As Daly (2007) explains, epistemology is concerned with the question, "how do we, as inquirers, come to know the realities we are trying to apprehend?" (p. 23). Epistemological assumptions are often distinguished between a dualist and objectivist position, and a subjectivist and transactional position (Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). The dualist and objectivist position assumes that there is a patterned reality with a set of law-like qualities that can be observed by a researcher and who can produce knowledge without bias (Daly, 2007; Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). On the other hand, the subjectivist and transactional position assumes that it is impossible to divorce knowledge from the 'knower' because all knowledge is influenced by the values and preferences of the researcher (Daly, 2007). This subjective position accepts that knowledge is co-constructed via the interactions between a researcher and their participant and is therefore influenced by the prior experiences and values of both the researcher and participant (Tamminen & Poucher, 2020).

This study used a *constructivist paradigm* guided by a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology. The methodological assumptions of constructivism assume that knowledge is co-created by the interactions between the researcher and participant during the investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It also acknowledges that the prior experiences of the researcher and the subjective judgments of those experiences cannot be removed from the findings (Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). Consequently, the researcher adopted the role of 'passionate participant' guided by a constructivist philosophy (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This role suited the current study as the lead researcher had a background as an elite tennis player, playing at a division 1 NCAA University for four years, as well as experience participating in professional tennis tournaments. The lead researcher also had extensive coaching experience

that spanned 10 years across a range of contexts that included professional, intercollegiate, and amateur players. Based on this, it must be acknowledged that the researcher's prior experiences as both a tennis player and coach inevitably influenced the contents and the interpretation of the findings.

Methodology

Qualitative studies use various research designs to guide the data collection and analysis, and each have different purposes that make unique contributions to research (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2017). Some examples include ethnography, case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative research, and generic qualitative research (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2017; Creswell, 2014). More specifically, generic qualitative research is interested in learning how people experience, construct, and make sense of their reality (Kahlke, 2014). Generic approaches are considered highly flexible as they can draw upon multiple methodologies that blend compatible techniques without claiming alignment to a more specific and rigid methodology (Kahlke, 2014). Furthermore, research by Bradbury-Jones and colleagues (2017) found that studies that employed a generic approach tended to achieve higher levels of alignment between their fundamental assumptions and their methodology compared to more specific approaches. As a result, this study employed a generic qualitative approach in a bid to achieve a high level of alignment and trustworthiness.

Participants

Qualitative research sampling involves strategically choosing participants that are best suited to explore a study's research questions (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). It is often described as *purposive sampling*, as the participants are often selected because they have specific experiences and qualifications that will enable them to provide a rich account of the phenomenon of interest (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Among the numerous sub-categories of purposive sampling, this study used *criterion-based sampling*, whereby participants were

selected based on a predetermined set of specific attributes or experiences that they possessed (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This study sampled four current professional tennis coaches from the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP). Participants met the following criteria: (a) they had coached for at least five seasons on the ATP tour; (b) the coach's player had an ATP ranking inside the top-20 at some point during the season they were their coach. As such, this study captured 20% of the coaching population of the top-20 players; (c) the coach's player had competed in at least one grand slam in their career; and (d) the coach travelled with their player on tour for at least 20 weeks of the season. On average, the coaches in this study had more than 15 years of tour coaching experience, with all four participants coaching a top-20 ranked ATP player at the time of their respective interview. In their careers, the coaching group had collectively coached male and female players to four singles grand slam titles and one grand slam doubles titles. Additionally, the coaching group had won more than 15 ATP titles with their current players. Finally, the coaches were from three of the six continents, representing a diverse and global sample.

Procedures. Following approval from the McGill Research Ethics Board, the lead researcher recruited eligible participants using his extensive network he had built in tennis. Potential participants were contacted via email using a script that outlined the details of the study (see Appendix A). The participants were able to choose a date and time that was most convenient for them to have a virtual interview with the lead researcher. Prior to the first interview, participants were also provided with a consent form (see Appendix B) that was collected by email.

Prior to interviews with selected participants, a pilot interview was conducted with one expert tennis coach that enabled the lead researcher to practice his interview skills, as well as refine the interview questions. The research supervisor provided feedback on the pilot

interview to the lead researcher before data collection began. Interviews with each participant were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Collection

Interviews. Several methods of data collection are used in qualitative research, such as observations, interviews, and vignettes (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). However, in sport and exercise research the interview is the most commonly employed method (McGannon et al., 2021; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Interviews involve two or more people who participate in discussions of their experiences as a means of co-constructing knowledge about themselves and their social world (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Interviews are a particularly useful method to gain a rich and detailed account of another person's experiences, feelings, and insights as they relate to the study's research questions (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Furthermore, the flexibility of interviews allows a researcher to pursue unplanned avenues of inquiry as a conversation naturally unfolds, and both the researcher and participant can play a role in directing the conversation in this manner depending on what is personally meaningful to them (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). There are numerous types of interviews that are used in qualitative research that differ in the number of participants in the study, the role of the researcher, the degree of planning involved, how well the researcher knows the participants, and the structure of the interview itself (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). One such type of interview is the *individual semi-structured interview* whereby the researcher uses a set of pre-planned and open-ended questions that help guide the discussion (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The individual semi-structured interview is the most used form of interview in sport psychology research, and was an appropriate tool for this study, as it allowed the researcher to focus the discussion on participant experiences related to the research questions while also permitting space for unplanned avenues of interest to be pursued (McGannon et al., 2021; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Interview Guide. An interview guide (Appendix C) was used to aid the lead researcher throughout the conversation with each participant. Questions were open-ended and semi-structured to encourage richer details of participant experiences and to help ensure that the information gathered was relevant to the focus of the study (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Additionally, the lead researcher adopted a responsive interview style that acknowledged a conversational partnership with the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As a result, certain elements of a conversation—such as self-disclosure and expressing a point of view—were able to be undertaken by the researcher in order to build trust and help make the participant feel comfortable (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Opening questions served as an 'ice-breaker' to establish rapport and learn about each participant's sporting history (e.g., Briefly describe your journey to becoming a tennis coach of a professional player) The researcher then guided the interview toward key questions related to each participants' experiences coaching in professional tennis (e.g., What are some unique challenges in professional tennis that make coaching difficult?). Additionally, follow-up questions designed to clarify and extract richer details of participant answers were used (e.g., Can you tell me more about that?) (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The final group of questions invited participants to provide additional details or fill in any gaps that may have not been covered by earlier questions in the guide (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Data Analysis

There are numerous ways to analyse data in qualitative research, and the choice of analysis is dependent on the methodology employed (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Sparkes and Smith (2014) acknowledge that qualitative analysis relies on a skilled researcher to both interpret and assign meaning to the data collected. They also list many of the procedures required of the researcher, such as transcription, data management, immersing oneself in the collected data, contemplating how the data is constructed, and the importance of the

researcher possessing a reflexive awareness surrounding their interpretations of the data (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In line with the proposed philosophical assumptions and methodology of this study, a *reflexive thematic analysis* was used to analyse the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2016). Reflexive thematic analysis is a philosophically flexible and relatively straightforward technique that enables a researcher to "identify patterns of meaning across a qualitative dataset" (Braun et al., 2016, p. 191). It is important to note that the researcher plays an *active* role in knowledge production when using reflexive thematic analysis; knowledge is not passively 'found' as much as it is 'created' and continually reflected on (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In this way, thematic analysis enables a researcher to succinctly *generate* important themes from large sets of data and is therefore inherently (and openly) subjective, with writing playing an important role (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

This study used a six-stage recursive model of thematic analysis outlined by Braun et al. (2016). The first phase, *familiarization*, required the researcher to read and reread the data sets in an analytical way—with a sense of curiosity as to the ideas and concepts that may lie embedded—so that he became very familiar with the data and its possible meaning (Braun et al., 2016). The second phase, *coding*, involved tagging potentially relevant portions of the textual data (both at a latent and semantic level) to a brief phrase that was indicative of the content and its meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2016). The third phase, *theme generation*, required the researcher to group codes together to generate overarching themes that captured the shared meaning of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun et al., 2016). The fourth phase, *refinement*, required the researcher to review and refine the themes to ensure their analysis was representative of the datasets. As such, five candidate themes were arranged according to their relationship to one another, which organised them into two higher order themes (see Appendix D) that addressed the research questions in a compelling and

coherent manner (Braun et al., 2016). Once the researcher was confident that the reflective thematic analysis had captured the data in a coherent manner and answered the research questions, he moved on to the fifth phase, *naming the themes*. This was an exercise that attempted to capture the essence of each theme and the aspect of the data it represented (Braun et al., 2016). Lastly, the sixth phase, *writing the report*, involved further refinement to the analysis, as well as extracting relevant participant quotes that were used as an aid to the researcher's commentary on the important features to emerge from the study (Braun et al., 2016).

Trustworthiness

While quantitative research relies on concepts such as reliability, validity, and objectivity to establish rigour, qualitative research is based on a different set of ontological and epistemological assumptions, and therefore, uses a different set of criteria, centred on *trustworthiness*, to achieve rigour (Smith et al., 2009; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). To establish trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed concepts that were designed to run parallel to quantitative criteria (Smith et al., 2009). These included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and together they constituted the gold standard in qualitative research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). However, work by Smith and McGannon (2018) and Smith et al. (2009) critiqued the philosophically contradictory nature of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. More recently, researchers have emphasised that trustworthiness is best established when the study's methods and methodology are aligned with the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Smith et al., 2009; Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). As this study was guided by a constructivist paradigm comprised of ontological relativism and epistemological subjectivism, the researcher was not obliged to follow a set of predetermined universal criteria to establish rigour. Rather, the

criteria proposed below were chosen based on the context and objectives of the study (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

Initial Bracketing Interview. It must be acknowledged that the lead researcher has extensive experience as both an elite tennis player and tennis coach. As it was possible that the experiences of the participants overlapped significantly with that of the lead researcher, an initial bracketing interview was conducted to help ensure that the participants' experiences were given priority (Prior & Coates, 2020). The lead researcher enlisted the help of his thesis supervisor to engage in a reflexive conversation prior to interviews with the study participants. This conversation was designed to stimulate questions about the lead researcher's assumptions and preconceptions about coaching in tennis (Prior & Coates, 2020). It also helped to refine the semi-structured interview guide to minimize leading questions that could prompt or encourage a desired answer (Prior & Coates, 2020).

Critical Friends. Rigour can be enhanced by engaging in dialogue with a 'critical friend' that provides the researcher with an opportunity to receive feedback on their interpretations of the data (Smith & McGannon, 2018). The role of a critical friend is not to find consensus with the researcher, but rather, to challenge the lead researcher's construction of knowledge in an effort to promote reflexivity, as well as explore other possible explanations and interpretations of the data (Smith & McGannon, 2018; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). For this study, two critical friends were enlisted and used in an iterative manner. Specifically, the lead author shared his interpretations firstly with a PhD candidate of the McGill Sport Psychology Research Lab. While this PhD candidate did not have a background in elite tennis, he did have experience as a researcher of elite sport, as a professional athlete, as well as being a coach of an elite university team sport. Following this, the lead researcher then shared the interpretations with his thesis supervisor, who provided further feedback on the interpretations. The thesis supervisor played competitive tennis in his youth and has more

than 30 years of experience as a coaching science researcher. The critical friends' unique backgrounds and experiences in coaching and sport helped to challenge the lead researcher's assumptions and provided alternative interpretations on certain aspects of the data.

Reflexive Journal. A reflexive journal was used as a means for the lead researcher to take field notes and critically reflect on the details of the data collection process (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). At the conclusion of each participant interview the lead researcher took reflexive notes on the type of relationship he felt he had developed with the participant, as well as any notable appearances and responses that were observed and/or felt by the participant and researcher during the interview (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Additionally, notes also reflected on what the interview context was like and what effect this might have had on the path and nature of the conversation (Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Substantive Contribution and Width. The participants in this study were purposively recruited to ensure that the study reflected an elite sample of professional tennis coaches (Smith et al., 2014). As such, all four participants in this study were coaching a top-20 ranked ATP player at the time the interview was conducted, and the average professional tour coaching experience of the group was more than 15 years. Compiling such an elite sample of coaches is both rare and difficult, and despite the small sample size, still represents 20% of the coaches of top-20 ranked male tennis players. Given the extra money and resources available to higher ranked players compared to lower ranked players, it was beneficial to interview four coaches of players of a similarly elite calibre, as the experience of coaching players within different ranking cohorts may differ (i.e., coaching top-20 players may differ compared to players ranked outside the top-50, which may differ again compared to players outside the top-100). Having coached professional tennis players at the highest level of the game for an extended period, these coaches' lived experiences strengthened their ability to generate trustworthy accounts related to the research questions of interest.

Additionally, the four coaches came from three different countries and continents, ensuring that a variety of cultural backgrounds were included, and which helped to capture a more diverse and global perspective. Finally, direct quotes from the participants were provided in the results to allow the reader to judge for themselves both the quality of the evidence and the researchers' interpretation of the evidence (McGannon et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2014).

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter presents the results of individual interviews with four professional tennis coaches who are currently coaching male players on the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) tour. The interviews ranged from 61 to 110 minutes, and the combined duration of the four interviews was 303 minutes. These interviews were transcribed verbatim, producing 72 pages of single-spaced text. Using reflexive thematic analysis, the textual data produced 26 codes which was organized into five themes. Furthermore, these themes were grouped together and produced two overarching themes that were titled: *professional tennis environment* and *professional tennis coaching*. This chapter will provide descriptions and participant quotes to present a detailed account of these themes. Pseudonyms (e.g., Jason) will be used throughout the chapter to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Professional Tennis Environment

This overarching theme describes the contextual features of the professional tennis tour that present unique coaching challenges to tennis coaches, which is further split into the subthemes titled *environmental challenges* and *who's the boss?*

Environmental Challenges. This theme explores coaches' descriptions of the unique challenges resulting from the structure and governance of the ATP. The participants alluded to the importance of having tour experience with respect to securing a coaching job. Specifically, players were perceived as seeking a coach who has the requisite knowledge and helpful contacts based on their experience on the ATP, which could prove to be difficult. Jason stated that "it's hard to get inside there (the tour), not because of what you have to do, but because you don't have the experience in the first place — so the pool of eligible coaches becomes smaller and smaller." Jason further described how having connections inside the professional game was perceived as useful by players, saying "If I were a player right now, it

would be hard to find a good coach who has the experience, as well as the contacts of other players and coaches." Similarly, Victor felt that it was difficult to first become a coach of a top player without prior experience as a player, or as someone who had worked for another player in some capacity, such as a hitting a partner:

> There are different pathways, but it's easier if you have been a top player yourself or have been a hitting partner for the top players. It's difficult to start with a top-400 player as a coach who has never worked on the tour. And it's not like you can get a degree or diploma for this. It's a small circle to get into. (Victor)

In the author's view, this alluded to some sort of Catch-22 for aspiring professional coaches, such that players wanted a coach with experience, but that experience could only come after someone initially gives an aspiring coach a chance. Perhaps due to this perceived value of having tour experience, Greg described how there appeared to be few tour coaches who pursued formal coach education training once they became professional coaches, even though he felt it could be beneficial to their growth and development:

> You don't see much coach education in professional tennis. You don't see many of the coaches studying or doing courses. I'm sure some have done it, but not many. Especially the former players, I don't think they would do something like that, but I think it is worthwhile.

Naturally, all the coaches in this study had gotten their initial chance to coach on tour, with Greg explaining how it happened in his case:

> When my (name of country) visa was done after college, (name of player) offered me a job. He said: "I'm going to turn pro. I'm leaving (name of college), and I want you to come travel with me." We started a trial period for the grass season in (country) and after that I was asked to coach him full-time. That was (many) years ago and I'm still here. (Greg)

Even after securing a coaching role, one coach described his perceptions relating to the difficulties of finding coaching mentors based on the competitive and cut-throat nature of professional tennis:

> I think one of the hardest things about being a coach on the ATP tour is that there's no school for it. At the beginning you have no idea. There's no way to study for it. There's no way for someone to teach you how to do it. And there is probably no motivation for other coaches to show you how because they're thinking "you're going to be taking out my job". That's how the environment is, or at least how everyone makes you feel. (Jason)

The researcher interpreted this quote to mean that professional tennis coaches necessarily look out for their own interests, and that helping other aspiring coaches could pose a threat on their own careers. As such, if aspiring coaches had trouble finding coaching mentors that could help them gain experience, getting an opportunity to coach on the tours could happen via other methods. For example, one coach explained how there is sometimes a serendipitous element to obtaining a coaching position on tour, where players hire known associates, even if they had no tennis background:

> Coaching in professional tennis is a slippery slope at the moment because pretty much anybody can be assigned as a coach to an ATP or a WTA (Women's Tennis Association) player, no matter what they know, even if they know nothing. It could be a parent, or it could be a friend, and they get a coach's badge and are allowed in the locker room. (Eric)

This perceived practice of hiring known associates suggested that entering the world of professional tennis coaching did not necessarily depend on your competency as a coach; sometimes simply knowing a player and having their approval was enough, as there is no formal hiring process beyond a player's consent that is required to become a coach.

Independent of who the player hired, the participants described a grueling coaching schedule categorized by travelling for extended periods away from family and home life:

> The logistics and organisation are pretty tough throughout the year because you are always travelling, and you are always tired. It's very tough to find that balance. (Greg)
>
> Coaching in pro tennis is difficult, but I'm lucky because of the quality of players that I've been able to work with. My life on tour has been as good as anyone's could possibly be. But you're still spending 35, 40 weeks away from home and you're on the road and away from family. (Eric)

All four coaches described the personal sacrifice of having to travel and be away from family for an 11-month season. However, it is the author's view that Eric's quote suggested that coaching higher ranked players made the travel and time away more palatable. This could be due to the more glamorous nature of the sport at the elite level; coaching top players means you get to travel to major cities, earn more money, and experience better hospitality.

In terms of on-court challenges, the long season with numerous changes of conditions also meant coaches felt it was difficult to balance the schedule between competing, and developing their players technically and physically:

> When you're in the top-50 you can play every tournament. It's more about being smart on when to rest, when to focus on working on your game, and gaining that energy that you need to compete. If you are a player that can play on all surfaces, it's easy to get carried away and play tournament after tournament. So you need to be smart about that scheduling. (Jason)

While excessive travel made it difficult to develop players tactically and technically, there also appeared to be challenges with maintaining a strong relationship. Specifically, coaches perceived the length of the season and the excessive travel as posing certain challenges with respect to maintaining a healthy coach-athlete relationship:

> There is so much pressure every week and you spend a lot of time together already. It gets hard when you're flying together, you're eating together, you're training together. You get tired, you know? It could be any kind of relationship. If you spend that amount of time together, it gets hard. I travelled last year completely with [name of player], and I didn't have the chance in the middle of the season to find someone else to share a couple weeks of coaching and travel in my place. I think that's key for the tour; having someone else to travel some weeks so that the player and the coach get some rest and some space from each other. (Jason)

Jason's quote seems to describe the difficult balancing act that coaches felt they had to manage with their player when it came to the amount of time they spent together, and how finding ways to spend time apart was considered an important factor to maintaining a healthy coach-athlete relationship. In addition to the challenges of maintaining a good relationship with their athletes, constantly travelling a global tour was perceived as creating numerous on-court difficulties as well, especially when it came to adapting to different conditions:

> You're never going to train in the same place, in the same city, with the same system. It's pretty tough. The player and the coach have to be constantly adapting to different situations and different conditions. And then you travel, and you get to a different place and the conditions are different, perhaps the balls are not good. So there's always something. In tennis, you only have a couple of weeks at the end of the year when you are home and things are set. (Greg)

As illustrated by Greg in the above quote, the constant travel was perceived as forcing players to continuously adapt. Greg also believed that these constant adaptations made it more difficult for coaches to accurately evaluate their player's performances:

> If tennis was a different kind of sport where you could train and play in the same place it would be easier to track what is working and what isn't. There are so many

variables in tennis that can affect the player. It makes it difficult to predict what is going wrong. (Greg)

To summarize, coaches described the unique challenges that the professional tennis tour creates. Specifically, they perceived the coaching environment to be a small pool of knowledgeable insiders who were wary to help others. The constant travel over the course of a long season meant that coaches needed to continuously help their players adapt to playing in different conditions, which they described as making it difficult to assess the true level of their player. Moreover, coaches described spending long periods away from family and extensive amounts of time with their player; a factor that was important to manage. Furthermore, exacerbating the pressures and challenges experienced by these professional coaches was a unique power dynamic that coaches felt influenced decision-making with players.

Who's the boss? This theme relates to professional tennis coaches' experiences in dealing with the complex power-dynamics between themselves, their player, and their player's entourage. In fact, the coaches in this study alluded to the fact that players were the ones who chose and invested in their coaches, and in their view, this dynamic could certainly influence a coach's approach:

> The players are the ones investing in their coaching. They are the ones paying someone else to tell them what to do. It's a weird situation. You see a lot of coaches not doing what they think they should do, or not making the decisions that they want to make, because they think they will lose their job if they put the player in a tough situation or do something that the player doesn't want to do. (Jason)
>
> You know, you might tell them something they don't want to hear and then you're gone. So I think in tennis coaching, that's really tough because the player decides; he

> has the last word on who is coaching him. But if the player is smart, they will want someone who will tell them what they actually think is best. (Eric)

As Jason and Eric described, having the athlete act as their employer was perceived to affect some coaches' behaviours and decision-making, such that coaches could potentially pander to the desires of their athlete to ensure they retained their job. Compounding this fear, coaches described the lack of contracts in professional tennis, with Jason stating that "very few coaches have a contract. There's very few that are not handshake agreements."

> My employment position is exactly the same as everybody else's in the game; you can be finished tomorrow and the coach has no power, so that is a real downside to coaching in tennis and to a large degree that needs to change. (Eric)

As Eric's quote illustrated, being a professional tennis coach could be a very tenuous position, and he felt that it would be beneficial for this to change to a certain extent. To that end, he elaborated on how a coaches' job instability could impact their lives beyond their coaching role:

> There's no security for somebody that's got a couple of kids and is traveling 35 to 40 weeks of the year. Their employment could stop tomorrow, and you know what that's like with the little things in life — it might be buying a house and having to show the bank what your income is going to be, and they look at a tennis player's contract and say "well this could stop tomorrow, so we can't give you any money because there's no security on what you're going to make in the next six months, let alone the next six years." (Eric)

Given these perceived financial risks, Victor described how he felt it was important to be financially independent before entering a coaching role so that he could be protected from the precarious employment situation. In his view, this could then enable coaches to speak their mind:

> I built financial independence to be able to do this job because at one point if you are not financially independent, you cannot do it. If you can't say to your player if it's white or black, you are going to lose. (Victor)

Further to this, players were not the only stakeholder with whom coaches believed they had to contend. Parents of the professional tennis players were often involved, and were sometimes perceived as acting as the de facto front office of the player enterprise:

> Dealing with parents, investors, or old coaches can be tricky. Maybe you had a parent or someone who spent a lot of time or money helping to invest in the player's career beforehand, so now they still think they get to call the shots and make decisions. (Jason)

> My philosophy is that you have to work *with* the parents. You don't try and remove the parents. For me this is not possible. But afterwards you need to build their role. It depends on the parents' involvement, and it depends on the character of the player, but you have to know how you are going to integrate the parents. You cannot extract them. (Victor)

In the author's view, Jason's and Victor's quotes suggest that it would be beneficial if parents would step back and let the coach do his job without interference. However, when parents want to remain involved, coaches thought that it was best practice to find a way of integrating parents into the player's team, rather than try and police their exclusion.

Some coaches felt that the player's sponsorship and media obligations, such as exhibition matches, public appearances, and social media activity, did not always align with improving their on-court performance. However, these commitments could also lead to significant financial gains, such that coaches felt that they sometimes needed to negotiate with their players over what to prioritize:

> They offered him a lot of money to play a new exhibition tournament at the end of November, but we were going to be in the middle of the preseason…travelling 20 hours with jet lag, playing for two days, and then travelling 20 hours back. My decision was for him to not play. I told him what I thought about that, but he could have said yes because there was a lot of money. (Jason)
>
> We have spoken to him about social media. The positives and negatives. There is a conflict of interest with the social media, because if they have a lot of followers, and they are winning more matches, then the brands are asking them to do more activity on social channels. (Victor)

A player's endorsements and media opportunities were often handled by an agent, a figure that coaches had to compromise with given a perceived conflict of interest. On the one hand, a player's endorsements and public appearances were a source of guaranteed income; something of a luxury in a sport reliant on winning matches to earn prize money. However, coaches perceived these off-court media obligations to be at odds with a player's ability to prepare and perform on the court, which is a factor necessary to attract endorsements in the first place:

> You have the requirement from the agent to play some exhibitions for the brands sponsoring you; the contracts that we have with the appearance fees means you need to play those exhibitions when you are a player of (name of player)'s calibre. And sometimes during a tournament there is the agent saying, "there's some guarantee in this tournament that you cannot escape". So you can imagine that there is some conflict of interest with the agent and the player team, but you have to work with that. You have to make decisions with them because this is the reality of the top level. (Victor)

To conclude, coaches described how a unique power-dynamic with their player was perceived to affect coaching behaviours and decisions. Furthermore, the lack of contracts with their player meant coaches felt the job lacked financial security; a factor that had ramifications in the personal lives of these coaches. As a result, one coach explained how it was important to have financial freedom as a prerequisite to becoming a professional tennis coach in order to be able to speak their mind with their player. Finally, coaches outlined how they had to navigate and negotiate with several other stakeholders within a player's entourage, including a player's parents and agents.

Professional Tennis Coaching

This overarching theme relates to the beliefs, knowledge, and strategies used by professional tennis coaches to develop their players both on and off the court. The themes in this section include *organisation and leadership, relationship building,* and *training the player*.

Organisation and leadership. This theme explores how professional tennis coaches plan and establish optimal conditions conducive to player development and success. While all the coaches in this study were considered the main coach of their respective player, several coaches explained how top players in today's game often assemble an extensive team to facilitate their performance throughout the year:

> At a certain level you have to be able to build a team around the player because players in the top-50 usually have one or two coaches, one or two physios, at least one fitness coach, one statistics guy, and some consultants and advisors. You have to have some people that challenge and bring some new ideas. This is the reality for a top-20 player nowadays. (Victor)

In the author's view, Victor's insight highlights how building a large coaching team might be a rather new phenomenon in professional tennis. Echoing this sentiment, Eric described how

he felt that coaches' mindsets had changed in recent years. In his view, coaches were now more willing to seek outside help for their player:

> One thing that a lot of the coaches are doing now — and I've seen it more and more, whereas in the old days it didn't happen at all because I think coaches were much more protective of their jobs and protective of their players — is that now a lot of the coaches are willing to bring other people in to get outside help. And that is a great thing because the player appreciates it. If you've got a particular problem with a serve, or it might be their mentality, or it could be movement, it could be anything, and it's not quite improving at the rate that you want it to improve. The willingness to get a second coach in, or to get a different set of eyes from a fitness point of view, well the coaches are doing that now. (Eric)

As a result of these larger teams, participants perceived that their role as a coach of a top ATP player had changed, specifically becoming more managerial in recent times. As Victor explained, "The role of the coach at this level is more like a manager than before. You are still doing the matches and running practises, but I spend a lot of time communicating and managing the team around (name of player)." In line with Victor's thoughts of the role of an ATP coach, Eric felt that it was also important for coaches to manage the culture of the team: "A top player will already have a manager, parents will probably be involved, they probably have a physio, and they probably have a fitness trainer. You've got to try to manage that culture as best you can."

Although these coaches described an environment of burgeoning coaching teams catering to a player's needs, the author perceived that these coaches were also wary of pandering too much to their player. Specifically, these coaches felt that it was important to foster a high degree of responsibility and autonomy in their players:

> You can tell sometimes some players get overwhelmed by their coaches doing everything for them. They'll throw his trash away almost. Luckily (name of player) isn't like. He doesn't need babysitting and he doesn't want that, but you have to be careful not to do too much for the player, because maybe you're hurting him by not letting the player become independent. (Greg)
>
> It is important to be strong internally, independently, and not relying on external things or someone's helping hand. I think it's a tough philosophy in our world today, but I think if you are able to pass that on to your player then your player is going to be really strong, because he's going to believe in his internal strength and not go looking for a shortcut of 'OK I need this guy or this thing outside.' (Victor)

In the author's view, there appears to be a delicate balancing act between building a team capable of catering to a top player while simultaneously cultivating the player's independence and autonomy so that they are resilient to the challenges of professional tennis. Irrespective of their personal coaching philosophies, these coaches described the importance of adapting to their player's unique perspective in order to reach a shared vision:

> There has to be some things that you stand for that have to be there no matter who you coach. There are other things you can work around and see what motivates the player. It's important to know the player's dreams or understand why he is doing what he is doing. From there, you try and instill the things that you believe are really important. (Greg)
>
> The coach has to have a vision for the player that he is working with. It's a vision in terms of where we want to go, but this discussion is coming from the player saying, "OK, I want to win a grand slam, I want to be #1, or I want to be top 30" and then afterwards you have to build a process to reach this point. (Victor)

In sum, coaches perceived that their roles had shifted in recent times as a player's coaching entourage grew in number, with the participants perceiving their roles as becoming more managerial. Despite the consequent assistance of more specialised team members, these coaches perceived that it was important to develop a sense of responsibility and independence in their player. Lastly, the coaches' overall philosophy and vision appeared to be somewhat adaptable, able to be fitted to a player's motivations and goals, such that a common vision could be established between the player and coach. This shared vision likely aided the coaches in building a strong relationship with their player.

Relationship building. This theme explores the coaches' application of interpersonal coaching knowledge to better understand and connect with their player. Jason perceived that developing trust with a player could be particularly challenging, especially given that coaching changes happen often in professional tennis:

> It's hard for players to find someone they can trust when coaching changes happen so often in tennis; one minute he's your coach, and then next month he's coaching your opponent. That's why I think players don't open up to anybody. They don't want to show any weaknesses because they feel like you can use it against them in the future. (Jason)

Jason's quote appears to reflect a sentiment that players are sometimes reluctant to open up to their coach, including communicating performance expectations. As a possible consequence, coaches described how they felt that it was important for them to take the lead in explicitly articulating the expectations of both the player and coach from the beginning of the partnership:

> I think connecting with the player and building a strong relationship is key. It's very important from the beginning of the relationship to set the boundaries of what you're expecting from the player, because it's hard to change things when you've already set

> the bar at one point. The first conversation I had with [name of player], I said, 'this is what I want to work on, and this is what I'm going to ask from you. This is what I want you to be doing every time we go on court. And if I feel that this is not happening, then you're going to see me go'. (Jason)

The author interpreted this quote to mean that coaches felt that clearly outlining tennis-specific expectations could help build trust in the relationship. Specifically, having well-defined standards helped the player and coach reach a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities, as well as serve as a benchmark that could be used to continuously hold each other accountable. While clear on-court expectations appeared to be important, coaches also described the importance of providing off-court flexibility and socialization opportunities for their player and coaching team to ensure their attitudes remained positive:

> You have to adapt to what they like to do in their time off, whether that's staying in the hotel, or walking around the city sightseeing, or going out to eat at a fancy restaurant. Sometimes you need to find a good restaurant to ensure that they are going to have a good time the night before their match. You do a lot of these little things that are way more important than just being on the court and working on the technique or the strategy. (Jason)

> Inside the court we are sometimes butting heads, but off the court the team will be friends, they will get along great, because we enjoy our time together. We play cards all day, watch football, go to dinner. It's not like the day finishes and we don't see each other. It goes beyond tennis, and (name of player) likes that. (Greg)

The author interpreted these quotes to mean that the coaches' role extended beyond the court, which was perceived to be highly important to the overall success of the player by virtue of providing balance and social support while on tour. Given the extensive amount of time

coaches and players spend together on tour, Victor felt that the alignment of the personalities of the coach and player was a necessary starting point for a good relationship to blossom:

> It's important to get along with the player because you spend so much time on the court, but you spend much more time travelling, having lunches, dinners, and discussions, you know. It's like the desk is always open to you and the other person. So if the character or the philosophy is not matching, it's not possible. (Victor)

Nevertheless, irrespective of how well the coach and athlete clicked, the extensive periods of time spent together was described as challenging the coach-athlete relationship. To that end, Eric perceived that the constant time spent together could result in fatigue between the dyad:

> There's a wear-down factor in tennis more than other sports — and especially team sports — because you're one-on-one. You're traveling with one player, catching every flight together, staying at the same hotels together, having breakfast, lunch, and dinner together. And you're on the court working together from a physical, technical, tactical, and mental point of view. The connection between the player and the coach is incredibly important, but there can be a wear-down factor. (Eric)

Consequently, as a means of protecting the health of the relationship, these coaches also described how they felt it was important to know when spending time away from their player would be beneficial to both parties:

> You have to be careful of that wear-down. There has to be a distance that you keep. Obviously, the connection is really important, but there has to be a distance that you keep to ensure that you're protecting the longevity of your job. (Eric)
>
> When we started travelling, I would do every week because I was full-time, but now I try to give him his space and he tries to give me mine. We don't spend as much time off the court as we did in the beginning. We still get along great and anytime he has a problem or something important that he needs to talk about he comes to me. (Greg)

Taking these coaches' accounts into consideration, the author interpreted that spending too much time together can hinder the coach-athlete relationship, such that creating space off the court was necessary to a long-lasting dyad. Perhaps used as a strategy to create space with their player, coaches perceived that it was important to encourage their player to have interests beyond tennis that could help take their mind off the sport and find meaning in other areas of their lives:

> You need a life outside of tennis, for sure. We need a purpose for why we're playing, why we're getting out of bed every day, why you're doing the training, why you're suffering on the court. But you also need some purpose off the court as well. It could be your family, it could be a partner, or it could be an outside interest with another sport. (Eric)

> When all you think about are your ranking points, your forehand, or how you feel about your serve, then, yeah, it becomes like life or death. But if you understand that it's just something that you're doing in this part of your life, but you are also studying marketing, or philosophy, or you're opening a business on the side, then maybe you realise that tennis is just one part of your life, and I think that helps take some pressure off the player. (Jason)

To conclude, given the high frequency of coaching changes in tennis, coaches felt that players could be wary of trusting coaches. Coaches also emphasised the importance of setting clear expectations from the beginning of the relationship, while also trying to adjust to the social habits of their player in a bid to improve their mindset while on tour. Given the extended periods of time that a coach and player can spend together, these participants felt that it was important to understand when to give a player space to avoid wearing down the dyadic relationship. Finally, coaches perceived that engaging in passions outside of tennis helped their players find a perspective that was beneficial to them both on and off the court.

Training the player. This theme delves into the application of coaching knowledge that helped professional tennis players develop the tactical, technical, and mental skills necessary for on-court success. Perhaps due to the recent trend of players sourcing a larger team of specialists, Victor perceived that it was possible to help players achieve successful outcomes even if the coach did not possess all the prerequisite professional knowledge:

> You need to have the competency to fuel your player with some tools, whether it is technical, tactical, or mental. I think it depends on your strength as a coach. I have seen some coaches that have no knowledge in terms of biomechanics, but they were able to go on and coach top players. It really depends on the player and the coach. (Victor)

Victor's quote appears to reflect that coaches could be successful while not being well versed in all forms of professional coaching knowledge (e.g., tactical, technical, physical, or mental), but that it is likely important for a coach's primary area of expertise to align with a player's needs. With respect to a player's developmental needs, focusing on strengths to maximise potential was emphasised by several of the participants:

> You need to know your strengths and work on them more than anything. The things you aren't so good at, you're never going to have time to make them a strength. You can cover them and try and avoid other players exposing you there, but if you want to have a great career you need to know what you're good at and master that. (Greg)
>
> Knowing what their strengths are and building that confidence, it's so important, because there's real joy in doing what you're good at. And secondly, when you need to win a tennis match, you're not going to win with your weaknesses. You will win them with your strengths. In big moments, players lean on their strengths. That's why you always have that 80/20 rule, where 80 percent of the time you're working on the

> strengths and improving the strengths, and then you address the weaknesses after. (Eric)

These quotes highlight how these coaches believed that the application of tactical and technical coaching knowledge is most effective when focused on their players' strengths. To assist with this tactical and technical coaching, coaches described how the modern coaching environment enabled them to access more information from a broader range of sources:

> We're blessed with so much information now from a coaching perspective — the analytics and coaching tools — that we weren't aware of or had access to before, and the cross-sport sharing is much bigger now than it ever used to be as well. Just a couple of days ago I was in (city) at the (city sports team) sharing information, learning how to coach more effectively, how to deal with situations in a better way from a technical and tactical point. (Eric)

As a result of access to increased sources of information, Jason perceived that having well-researched data to back up his suggestions made it easier to convince his player to work on certain technical elements:

> Once you find something that you want to work on, you have to do the research and have everything ready for them for when they ask questions. In that situation, you need to have the evidence to say "this is what you're doing wrong, and this is why we're trying something different. If you don't want to do it, don't do it, but you have seen here in the video, you can see it here in the numbers…" The more evidence you have, the easier it becomes. (Jason)

In a similar vein, Greg described how he felt it was helpful for his player to review videos of his own matches where tactical errors had resulted in a loss, perceiving that this practice had helped to convince his player to make tactical adjustments to his game:

> I showed him a lot of videos, a lot of matches where he had the match won and he didn't go for it and then afterwards he really regretted it. So then I was saying, 'OK, next time you're in that situation, are you going to let the same thing happen, or are you at least going to take it?' (Greg)

Building on this theme of watching tennis, Greg felt that watching the matches of other players was also important. He explained that his player previously did not watch matches, but that a poor loss to a lowly ranked player became a turning point that resulted in Greg's player watching more tennis, ultimately culminating in more on-court success:

> In the beginning (name of player) didn't watch much tennis. It got to a point where he lost to (name of opponent) in the qualifying of (tournament), and he didn't even know who the guy was when we went to the match. So after the match I was like "you're trying to have an unbelievable career and you're playing people you don't even know in the face. I can watch as many matches as you want, but you're the one who's going to be out there playing." I think from there he started to watch a lot of tennis and he actually enjoys watching matches now and knowing what players are doing in big moments. I think that helped him a lot. (Greg)

Beyond the tactical and technical components of coaching, Eric also perceived that nurturing the emotional side of their player was becoming a facet that coaches were more aware of in recent years:

> The emotional quotient has become a much bigger factor in tennis and that is something a coach has had to learn to deal with; to help the player get through all those tough moments from a pressure point of view, from a mental health point of view, from overtraining, from undertraining, from doubts, from parent issues. It's all involved now. Back in my early days of coaching everything was about the tennis IQ. Now I think it's about 50/50 with the EQ and the IQ. (Eric)

In the author's view, the role of the coach seems to have expanded, or at least shifted, to monitor and cater to the emotional and mental state of their player more closely. One possible reason may be that the recent trend of larger teams of specialists in the technical and tactical domains has meant coaches can now focus on the mental aspect of their player more closely. Relatedly, Eric perceived that the mindset of the younger generation of players was different, and that this required coaches to adapt to their needs:

> My mindset and thoughts and coaching style was old school. But the players of this generation want to see some empathy if they are suffering. They want to see that it means something to the people around them and see that they are suffering as well. (Eric)

To summarize, coaches felt that there were numerous ways to coach a top player, based on the fit between the strengths of each coach and the needs of the player. There was a consensus among the coaches that it was important to work on a player's strengths, not only to help them become better a player, but to also aid their mentality while on tour. Additionally, coaches described how the increasing access to information in various forms (e.g., data, videos) had enabled them to coach more effectively from a technical and tactical perspective, including by getting players to review opponents' game film. Finally, some coaches perceived that the mental preparation had become a stronger area of focus to coaches in recent years, perhaps due to the newer generation of players wanting to be coached differently than their predecessors.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore professional tennis coaches' perspectives on their unique coaching context and understand how – if at all – they employed holistic coaching practices to develop their athletes both on and off the court. Results showed that elite professional tennis coaches operate within a distinctive coaching context that requires them to navigate numerous relational and organisational challenges that are uncommon in other professional sport settings. Professional tennis coaches also described using holistic coaching strategies to simultaneously improve their player's performances and the coach-athlete relationship. Overall, these findings provide insight into an understudied population of sports coaches, revealing how they work within the constraints of a unique coaching context to help their players achieve successful outcomes. As such, this chapter will be divided into three sections: *unique power dynamics*, *interpersonal coaching knowledge*, and *environmental challenges*. The first section relates to the complex power-dynamic that professional tennis coaches experience between themselves, their player, and their player's entourage. The second section addresses the interpersonal strategies coaches use to manage the relationship with their player and the broader coaching team. Finally, the third section will discuss coaches' perceptions of becoming a touring professional tennis coach and how they train their player within the professional tennis context.

Unique Power Dynamics

Coaches described how professional tennis players were the ones who selected and invested in their coaches, and were therefore the de facto employer and ultimate decision-maker within the dyad. Several coaches noted how this power imbalance affected coaching behaviours in their peers, such that they felt some coaches made decisions to avoid conflict with their player in the interest of preserving their employment, rather than improving the

performance of their player. While previous literature in elite coach-athlete relationships have described coaches as leaders and authority figures (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Jowett & Wachsmuth, 2020) who were often backed by powerful social and organisational structures (Armstrong et al., 2022; Lara Bercial & Mallett, 2016), the current findings suggest that professional tennis coaches occupy a tenuous role as a player's employee and are therefore susceptible to pandering to their player. For example, coaches felt that some of their peers often changed/softened their feedback to avoid upsetting their player, a factor that does not appear to be a as relevant for coaches in other sports, who are the traditional custodians of power in the coach-athlete relationship (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016). However, the highly accomplished coaches of this study felt that it was impossible to coach successfully at this level without having difficult conversations with their athletes. For example, coaches described several instances of how they negotiated with their player to skip lucrative exhibition matches in favour of off-season training, as well having their player watch more tennis matches of possible opponents rather than relying on the coach's scouting report. While this finding aligns with research on SWCs, who acknowledged that they needed to make difficult – and perhaps unpopular – decisions on a daily basis with the aim of improving athlete performances (Fraser et al., 2024; Hodge, 2014; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Vallée & Bloom, 2016), it appears that making such decisions in professional tennis is exceedingly difficult given that the player is also the coach's employer. From a practical perspective, these findings help inform prospective professional tennis coaches of how power imbalances with their player can create divergent incentives that are detrimental to the dyad, but that helping a player achieve high levels of performance nevertheless requires them to make some difficult decisions. Future research could examine the perceptions of professional tennis players with respect to the power they hold in the coach-player relationship, as well as the traits they believe are most beneficial in a professional tennis coach. Specific to coaching

behaviour, it would be interesting to explore the type of coaching feedback that professional players value, and whether this changed depending on their ranking. For instance, do more successful players value feedback that challenges their current beliefs and game styles more so than less successful players?

Compounding the power imbalance of the coach-athlete relationship, some of the professional tennis coaches described how their working relationship with their player was essentially based on a "handshake agreement." For some coaches, these agreements lacked a legally binding contract and could be terminated by the player at any moment. This financial uncertainty created implications that went beyond their coaching role, such as making it difficult for coaches to obtain a loan when trying to buy a house. This finding aligned with a small body of research on the golfer-caddie dyad (Carey et al., 2021; Mull, 2019; Schlereth, 2015), such as Carey and colleagues' (2021) description of the employment arrangement between a golfer and their caddy being ungoverned by the Professional Golfers' Association Tour (PGA), with the golfer being the arbiter of the terms of agreement and having the power to terminate the arrangement. This created certain anxieties for the caddies who understood that their financial security and longevity in the job rested wholly in their player's hands. The current findings extend Carey and colleagues' (2021) study by enhancing our understanding of how employment arrangements work in a novel sporting context (i.e., professional tennis) in which the player can hire his own coaching team without oversight from governing bodies (Gibson, 2010), along with the impact these arrangements can have on coaches. Practically speaking, aspiring professional tennis coaches can use this information to better prepare themselves for the uncertainty of this role. As one participant described, gaining financial independence from other sources of income can help make coaches immune to the tenuous nature of professional tennis coaching. While it may be unreasonable to expect professional tennis coaches to be financially independent before taking on this role, they could take steps

to create secondary or passive income streams to not be completely financially dependent on their player.

Beyond the coach-athlete dyad, coaches also described the difficult task of managing the entourage surrounding their player, which included parents, player agents, and investors. Specific to parents, some coaches believed that they were sometimes overly involved in their player's professional career, but that it was important to find a way to integrate them harmoniously into the team, rather than try and remove them. This finding aligns with literature on elite youth tennis where parents were found to be heavily invested in the development of their child from a young age, and where youth coaches coordinated closely with parents to better understand their player and ensure transparency in the coach-athlete relationship (Dohme et al., 2021; Papich et al., in press). Expanding beyond a youth sport context, Gould and colleagues (1999) found that successful Olympic coaches were proactive in creating roles for the athletes' parents during the Games, which served to minimize athlete distractions, whilst still allowing families to provide support; a factor that was found to correlate with more successful teams. The current findings extend this research by revealing that parents of professional tennis players continue to be heavily involved beyond a player's youth context, and that successful coaches find ways to integrate parents into the team by assigning them clear roles. As such, future research could investigate the types of roles that coaches assign parents in different sporting contexts. For example, given that players hold more power in the professional tennis context, it is possible that some tennis coaches assign parents more central roles in the team in order to please their player, compared to athletes from other sports where coaches are the traditional custodians of power and decision-making. Furthermore, while Gould and colleagues (1999) found family support correlated with more successful teams at Olympic games — typically a two-week event — it is unclear if this effect would hold in the professional tennis context, where the season runs for 11 months of

the year, and player's travel as individual athletes, which may result in a higher frequency of family interactions compared to team-sport athletes.

In addition to developing roles for parents, coaches also mentioned the necessity of negotiating with their player's agent. For instance, one coach described how decisions during tournaments had to align with the agent's plans of player media appearances to ensure that the player fulfilled their sponsorship obligations. As such, despite media appearances and exhibition games being a reality of commercialised professional sport, coaches felt that such activities could distract their player and negatively impact their on-court performances. Given this predicament, one coach described that it was in his power to educate his player on the pros and cons of having a strong media presence, but that it was ultimately the player's decision on how to act. Therefore, these professional coaches' responsibilities were found to extend beyond immediate athlete performances and required them to interact and negotiate with powerful figures, such as athlete agents, corroborating previous research on professional sports coaching (Heelis et al., 2020; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Potrac & Jones, 2009; Purdy et al., 2019). For example, Purdy and colleagues (2019) studied how European professional basketball coaches accommodated the interests of club owners and player agents, which often resulted in them deviating from their professional coaching ideals to salvage a workable solution, such as recruiting players onto their team based on an agent's demands, rather than recruiting players that they felt would best improve performances. However, while treating players as tradeable commodities might be used as a solution in some professional sport contexts (Glaude et al., 2024; Purdy et al, 2019), this is not a possibility in professional tennis. Therefore, the current findings offer novel contributions to the professional sport coaching literature by revealing how successful tennis coaches educate their more powerful players, as well as negotiate with player agents, in a bid to ensure their player's on-court performances are minimally impacted by commercial obligations. Given the

unique power-dynamics facing tennis coaches, future research could examine if there were differences among coaches in how they dealt with agents, based on their experience and reputation. For example, some coaches are former grand slam champions, and may command more power and authority if they coached a current player of a lower calibre, which may impact how they choose to respond and deal with activities beyond the immediate performance of their player.

Interpersonal Coaching Knowledge

As it relates to developing a strong relationship with their players, the coaches described the difficulty of travelling with their player around the world for the 11-month professional tennis season, such that developing strategies that could help preserve the dyadic relationship was critical. While previous research has explored the coach-athlete relationship in individual sports (Bloom et al., 1998; Jowett & Meek; 2000; Rhind & Jowett, 2010; Rhind et al., 2012), these studies were not specifically conducted within the professional context. For example, Rhind and Jowett (2010) found that coaches of international, national, and collegiate level athletes from team and individual sports felt that it was helpful to spend time socialising and traveling with their athlete as way to help maintain the coach-athlete relationship. Similarly, Jowett and Meek (2000) studied married coach-athlete dyads of Greek national athletes in track and field and found that working in a one-on-one manner and constantly being in proximity facilitated the dyad's co-orientation (i.e., the understanding of each other's cognitions). Thus, the current findings provide a nuanced perspective of a positive coach-athlete relationship within the professional tennis context. Specifically, coaches described the importance of building and maintaining a strong relationship with their player, but they also noted the importance of maintaining a certain distance to ensure the longevity of the relationship. Coaches' strategies to achieve this included eating fewer meals with their athlete, relying on the player's entourage to accompany them during tournament

days, as well as traveling fewer weeks together. Given the somewhat unique findings of this study, future research could explore if the effect of time spent together in different coach-athlete dyadic relationships requires different maintenance strategies. For example, how do environmental factors — such as the length of season, the size of the entourage, and the frequency of travel — influence the coach-athlete relationship, including how these factors might impact the necessity of creating distancing strategies between coaches and athletes?

Despite working closely with their player, coaches noted that in the contemporary professional tennis environment there was a recent trend of players accruing larger teams of specialists with the aim of improving performances. As a result, coaches believed that it was their responsibility to seek people who could challenge the current notions of the team with new ideas, as well as manage the culture of the burgeoning coaching team to the best of their abilities. These findings align with literature on successful high-performance coaches and general managers who viewed the selection of the right staff as critical to developing a culture of excellence that contributed to athletic success (Armstrong et al., 2022; Fraser et al., 2024; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Preston et al., 2015; Rathwell et al., 2014). For example, Armstrong and colleagues (2022) explored how general managers from the Canadian Hockey League built and sustained cultures of excellence, with participants crediting part of their success to being able to hire the staff they wanted and having the freedom to implement their ideas. Importantly, while staff members were chosen in part for their specific competencies, understanding their personal values was a critical part of the hiring process. This helped ensure that each member of the staff was subsequently aligned with the goals of the organisation. Therefore, while this study corroborates that coaches appear to have an important role in shaping and managing the culture of a sports team (Armstrong et al., 2022; Fraser et al., 2024; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016), it is less clear what role the athletes play in the process within a context in which they are the de facto employer. For example, it is highly

likely that the professional tennis coach must obtain their player's approval before bringing in outside staff, which is likely a unique dynamic compared to many other contexts. As a result, future research could examine more specifically how the cultures of professional tennis teams are created and sustained. For example, are the values and overall vision primarily set by the player, the coach, or a synthesis of both viewpoints? Answering such questions could provide more information about the development and maintenance of professional tennis team cultures. More generally, such research could inform professional coaches on the processes by which players can be included in the creation of team culture.

Environmental Challenges

The participants described the challenge of initially becoming the coach of a (top) professional tennis player, since there was no educational resources or clear pathway to the job that could provide knowledge and support. One coach even noted that the parents and friends of a player could assume credentialed coaching roles at tournaments, even if they had no coaching or playing experience themselves. Nevertheless, the coaches in this study mentioned that it was beneficial to have former professional touring experience, either as a player or hitting partner, when seeking a professional tennis coaching career. Of the four participants, three had significant experience as former professional players, and one had played at an elite university level. Reflective of the literature on the pathways of successful high-performance coaches (Carter & Bloom, 2009; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Schinke et al., 1995), several coaches in this study described serendipitous moments that provided them with an opportunity to begin working with an up-and-coming elite professional player shortly after their own playing career had ended. For example, Lara-Bercial and Mallett (2016) found that a common thread among SWCs revolved around "being in the right place at the right time" when making the transition from former athletes into professional coaching roles. From a practical perspective, given this study's findings corroborate the opportunistic aspect of

entering high-performance coaching, aspiring professional tennis coaches may look to increase their opportunities for pursuing a coaching career in tennis by seeking hitting partner roles of elite players. However, it is important to remain cognizant that these findings are drawn from a small sample size that may not be representative of the broader set of professional tennis coaches. For instance, Louis Cayer is a renowned tennis coach who has worked with many top professional doubles players, yet he was never an elite tennis player or hitting partner himself. Furthermore, Carter and Bloom (2009) studied successful University coaches in Canada who had no elite athletic backgrounds in their sports, yet they found that these coaches overcame their lack of elite playing experience by consulting with other coaches, practicing drills on their own, and communicating frequently with their athletes. Given the uniqueness of the professional tennis environment, future research could explore whether there are similar alternate pathways or methods that can enable a tennis coach without an elite playing background to become a successful coach on the professional tour.

Given the hyper-competitive nature of the professional tennis context, and the fact that most players only employ one coach, some coaches felt that it was difficult to seek mentors within the professional tennis context, as coaches of other players often perceived coaching peers as possible threats to their own careers. To circumvent this perceived barrier to mentorship, one coach described how they partook in learning experiences with a professional team of a different sport, and felt that such behaviour was becoming more common in the contemporary sports coaching landscape. These findings stand in contrast to literature that have highlighted the importance of a mentor figure — usually of the same sport — in the developmental pathways of successful coaches in elite sports (Bloom et al., 1998; Carter & Bloom, 2009; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Nash et al., 2024; Urquhart et al., 2020). More specifically, research on mentorship in sports coaching has highlighted how elite coaches value learning from peer interaction and observation of other coaches more highly

than from textbooks or coaching clinics (Cushion, 2006; Gould et al., 1990; Jones et al., 2009). For example, Urquhart and colleagues (2022) studied successful University ice hockey head coaches in North America, where the majority credited their time as an assistant coach in which they learned from a knowledgeable head coach as providing them with an awareness of the daily tasks and high standards required to succeed at elite levels. While contrasting previous studies in elite sport, the current findings corroborate the findings from one study conducted in the paralympic coaching context (Fairhurst et al., 2017) — another environment in which there is a small pool of expert coaches. Within this context, Fairhurst and colleagues (2017) found that coaches needed to reach out across parasport disciplines to gain knowledge that could be applied to their own athletes, such as adjusting equipment to cater to their athletes' disabilities, and how they could better assist their athletes in day-to-day tasks. While the current findings provide insight into the types of learning experiences that professional tennis coaches use in place of a tennis-specific mentor, it is less clear what types of knowledge these coaches obtain from such activities. For example, it is likely that mentors within the same sport can share specific professional knowledge, such as tactical and technical knowledge. However, as tennis coaches appear to seek learning experiences with coaches across other sports, it is possible that such learning opportunities would more closely deal with the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of coaching knowledge (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Therefore, future research could explore further how professional tennis coaches seek informal learning experiences, and what types of coaching-specific knowledge are discussed. From a practical perspective, these results inform future professional tennis coaches of the barriers that touring coaches face when it comes to mentorship from other tennis coaches. As a result, aspiring coaches may look to invest time in tennis-specific coaching knowledge through other means, such as textbooks, coaching clinics, and youth coaches. Additionally,

they could take steps to build coaching networks across sports, so that professional sport mentor figures are accessible to them once they are professional tennis coaches.

Coaches also described the difficulty of developing and training their player due to the long season and persistent travel. Specifically, coaches highlighted how constant travel resulted in players being tired from jet lag and needing to adjust to different balls, climates, and playing surfaces, such that coaches found it difficult to diagnose problems in their player's game. Furthermore, the ubiquitous tournament offerings, along with numerous sponsorship activities and exhibition events meant coaches rarely had enough time to develop their player in training. As a result, several coaches emphasised that it was important to prioritize their player's strengths in training, as this clarified the player's on-court identity, and helped to ensure that training sessions were enjoyable and sources of confidence. This finding aligns with research on positive psychology and strengths-based approaches to coaching in professional sports (Gordon & Gucciardi, 2011; Gucciardi et al., 2009; Hodge, 2014). For example, Hodge studied the motivational climate surrounding the New Zealand All Blacks during a period of unprecedented dominance and found that there was a clear focus on player and team strengths, rather than trying to reduce weaknesses, which was perceived to boost the players' self-esteem. Such a perception is supported by findings from Linley and colleagues (2010), who presented research suggesting people who use their strengths more have higher self-esteem, produce better performances, and experience less stress compared to those who use their strengths less. Thus, the results of this study add to the strengths-based coaching literature, where strengths-based coaching appears to be a successful strategy in the professional context when faced with environmental constraints, such as a short off-season and numerous changes in playing conditions. As such, future research could explore whether different coaching contexts affect the efficacy of strengths-based approaches. For example, coaches of youth players may find more value by addressing

their players' weaknesses more, as their players likely have longer off-seasons, less competitions, and more stable training environments (Nash et al., 2024). Similarly, given the coaches in this study coached some of the best players in the world, it is likely that their player's weaknesses were only regarded as such when compared to other elite players. In other words, their weaknesses had been developed to a point that still allowed them to succeed at the elite level. From a practical perspective, these findings can be applied by professional coaches more broadly, who may look to use a strengths-based coaching approach to help foster confidence and enjoyment in their athletes within the stressful and time-poor context of professional sports.

Finally, the coaches described several lifestyle challenges that accompany being a professional tennis coach — for example, the constant travel away from family, tenuous job security, lack of coaching collegiality, and lack of governing body protections — that, while not mentioned explicitly, made coaching in the professional tennis environment inherently stressful. These findings support previous literature that has found high performance sports coaching to be a demanding and stressful vocation (Kenttä et al., 2024; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016; Norris et al., 2017; Olusoga & Kenttä, 2017) and one that may also contribute to poor mental health outcomes (Frost et al., 2024; Häggland et al., 2024). For example, a systematic scoping review by Frost and colleagues (2024) on the mental health of elite sport coaches found several risk factors that were associated with poorer mental health, such as a lack of job security, poor work-life balance, and lack of organisational (i.e., governing bodies, such as the ATP) support. Given that many of these same risk factors were described by the participants of this study, it is possible that coaching in the professional tennis environment does little to prevent the likelihood of these coaches also experiencing mental ill-health issues. This is noteworthy, as there is evidence to suggest that a coach's mental health may impact their emotional states, verbal communication, coaching behaviours, and leadership

styles (Frost et al., 2024). For example, high performance coaches who experience symptoms related to burnout may become more passive in their interactions with their athletes (Lundkvist et al., 2012). Similarly, coaches who report experiencing anxiety may find it difficult to pursue short and long-term goals (Lee, 2021). Thus, these findings are of interest to the entire tennis coaching community, and it is worth further investigating the relationship between coach mental health and coaching effectiveness specifically in professional tennis. It is possible that such an avenue of research would not only benefit the well-being of high-performance coaches, but also improve athlete outcomes as it relates to effective coaching practices.

Chapter 6

Summary

Numerous studies have investigated the coaching philosophies and behaviours of successful sports coaches in elite contexts. Furthermore, these coaches were found to use holistic coaching practices and were concerned with the overall development of their athletes, despite the highly competitive nature of their environments (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Gould et al., 1999; Hodge, 2014; Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Mallett, 2005; Preston et al., 2015; Vallée & Bloom, 2005, 2016). While these studies have investigated coaches of individual and team sport athletes, scant research has investigated the coaching practices of elite professional tennis coaches, despite the unique power dynamic with their player (New York Tennis Magazine, 2018) and the global footprint of the game (ATP, 2021). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore professional tennis coaches' perspectives on their unique coaching context, and understand how – if at all – they employed holistic coaching practices to develop their athletes both on and off the court.

Upon receiving approval from the McGill Research Ethics Board, four experienced professional tennis coaches from the ATP tour were interviewed for this qualitative study. This purposive sample of coaches averaged more than 15 years of professional coaching experience, with all four participants coaching a top-20 ranked ATP player at the time of their respective interview. Using the extensive network that the lead author had built in tennis, participants were recruited via email to participate in a one-on-one virtual semi-structured interview that was written by the research team. Interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams by the lead author. Interviews ranged from 61 to 110 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Using a reflexive thematic analysis enabled the research team to identify patterns of meaning across the participants' lived experiences, which were then used to generate 26 codes, 5 themes, and 2 overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2016).

This study identified patterns in the data that led to two overarching themes that were labelled: *professional tennis environment* and *professional tennis coaching*. *Professional tennis environment* described the contextual features of the professional tennis tour that presented coaches with distinctive coaching challenges. *Professional tennis coaching* related to the knowledge, beliefs, and strategies that professional tennis coaches used to develop their players both on and off the court. Overall, results from the current study shed light on the practices of this understudied population of coaches, and enhanced our understanding of how professional tennis coaches developed their players within the challenging environment of the professional tennis tour.

Conclusions

Professional Tennis Environment

- No definitive pathway exists to becoming a professional tennis coach. However, having prior tour experience — especially as a player — was seen as beneficial to obtaining a coaching role of a top player.
- The hypercompetitive environment and dyadic coach-athlete team made it difficult for coaches to find mentors within the professional tour context, as coaches viewed other coaches as possible threats to their coaching positions.
- The 11-month season and global tour structure presented numerous challenges to coaches, such as; (a) being away from family for extended periods of the year; (b) finding the balance between playing tournaments and developing their players' skillset; (c) adjusting to new playing conditions on an almost weekly basis; and (d) spending excessive amounts of time with their player in ways that could strain the relationship.

- The unique power dynamic between coaches and athletes, whereby players select and invest in their coaches, making them the coaches' employer, can create a tenuous position for the coaches and affect the way they coach their player.
- Not every coach has a contract with their player, making it relatively easy for athletes to end coaching agreements at any moment.
- While financially lucrative, sponsorship activities and exhibition matches were described by the coaches as possibly impeding athletes' on-court performances.

Professional Tennis Coaching

- Top players can afford to assemble larger teams of specialists in today's game that include physiotherapists, data and statistics analysts, physical trainers, biomechanics consultants, and equipment technicians.
- Coaches described their roles as becoming more managerial within larger coaching teams, and they took steps to manage the burgeoning team culture, such as integrating parents into the team with clear roles, and negotiating with player agents regarding media obligations during tournaments.
- To preserve the health of the dyadic coach-athlete relationship, coaches employed numerous strategies to create distance with their players, such as not always eating meals together, and relying on the players' social entourage to spend time with them.
- While prioritizing tennis above all else, coaches nevertheless encouraged their player to take part in non-tennis activities, such as pursuing higher education online.
- Coaches focused trainings around their player's strengths to enhance playstyle clarity, confidence, and overall enjoyment of the sport.
- Some coaches collaborated with coaches from other sports to share coaching knowledge, and stated that cross-sport sharing was becoming more common.

- Rather than solely relying on their coaching points, coaches encouraged their players to watch footage of other players to enhance their on-court performances.

Practical Implications

The current study is among the first to explore the coaching perspectives of an elite sample of professional tennis coaches within their unique coaching context. The results provide a thorough description of the contextual challenges that professional tennis coaches must navigate, as well as the strategies and beliefs that successful coaches use to develop their players both on and off the court. Accordingly, these findings are useful for aspiring professional tennis coaches, as well as coaches of individual sport athletes who may operate in similar contexts.

Firstly, these results described specific career factors that could help aspiring coaches enter a professional coaching role. For example, while most of the coaches in this study were former professional players themselves, some coaches noted that other roles within a player's team, such as the hitting partner of a professional player, could provide a pathway to a head coaching position. Likewise, some coaches noted that it was not uncommon to see family and friends of a player get accreditation as the player's coach for tournaments, further highlighting the possible benefits of becoming acquainted with a player. Thus, as it pertains to acquiring a coaching job with a professional player, it is likely helpful for aspiring professional coaches to work in contexts that overlap with professional players, such as renowned private and national tennis academies.

Secondly, coaches alluded to the competitive culture and individual nature of the professional tennis environment as making it difficult for coaches to find a mentor, as coaches were perceived to look out for their own interests, and viewed other coaches as potential threats to their coaching job. However, one coach described how they fostered their coach development by interacting with professional coaches of other sports and noted that

such practices were becoming more common. Therefore, this information could be useful to aspiring professional tennis coaches, as well as professional coaches of other sports who may also lack access to mentors within their chosen field (e.g., paralympic coaches), as they can look to build coaching networks beyond their own contexts in order to find mentors and further develop their coaching knowledge.

Thirdly, this study demonstrated that professional tennis coaches perceived several challenges to coaching their player within a professional context, such as the unique power dynamic and the lack of job security. Although the coaches understood that this had the possible effect of creating divergent incentives in the coach-athlete dyad, such as coaches pandering to their player to avoid getting fired, the highly successful coaches in this study emphasised the importance of providing honest feedback to improve the on-court performances of their player. While aspiring professional tennis coaches might provide honest feedback to the non-professional athletes they coach, given the unique power dynamic in the professional context, it is important for them to understand that they might be tempted to pander to their player if they become the coach of a professional player. However, as the coaches in this study explained, this urge must be resisted despite the tenuous nature of their role. Considering that some coaches felt that building financial independence before assuming a professional coaching role was beneficial to coaching effectively in this environment, aspiring professional tennis coaches could consider developing secondary income streams to buffer against the tenuous nature of their employment, as well as help attenuate the effects of the power dynamics with their player.

Fourthly, this study shed light on specific on-court and off-court strategies that coaches perceived were helpful in building a successful partnership with their player within the challenging professional tour environment. Specific to the coach-athlete relationship, coaches highly valued connecting with their player, but were also aware that the dyad spent a

considerable amount of time together, which therefore required the coach to recognise when to create space with their player — for example, by eating fewer meals together — so that the health of the relationship could be preserved. Thus, coaches who work intensively for extended periods with a single athlete, such as boxing, diving, and golf caddies, can look to emulate these strategies to help maintain their relationships with their athletes. Specific to on-court strategies, coaches perceived that it was important to focus on their player's strengths when training during the season, as this clarified the player's on-court identity, fostered enjoyable experiences, and enhanced their player's confidence. This on-court information is useful for coaches of all sports, who may want to plan training sessions around competitions. Specifically, coaches in professional and non-professional (i.e., elite youth, or university) contexts may look to prioritize working on their players' strengths during competition events, or when preparing in the days leading up to competitive events.

Finally, this study revealed how professional tennis coaches practice numerous holistic coaching strategies to improve their athletes for sport and life. Although several tenets of holistic coaching — such as empowering athletes with decision making, allowing athletes to establish team goals, and using a democratic coaching style — are somewhat obligatory due to the unique power that players wield in their coach-player dyads, the highly successful coaches in this study — who participated under the condition of anonymity — seemed to genuinely support and believe in the tenets of holistic coaching as effective coaching strategies for their professional players. Furthermore, coaches described other instances of holistic coaching that appeared to be less influenced by the player. For example, several coaches explained how they were willing to seek outside help from novel sources (e.g., by bringing in consultants to challenge the team's notions) despite the fragile nature of their own employment. Additionally, one coach was supportive of his player pursuing a higher education degree online while playing, and felt that such activities provided his player

with a different perspective that buffered against the stress of the professional tennis tour. Thus, the results of this study suggest that the coaching practices of elite professional tennis coaches do align with the notions of holistic development.

Limitations and Recommendations

While the current study explored the experiences of a rare and understudied population of coaches in a unique environment, some limitations must be noted, beginning with the fact that player perspectives were not investigated. It is possible that players hold different interpretations of factors related to the professional tennis environment, including but not limited to the unique power dynamic between the player and coach, the coach-athlete relationship, and the roles and influence of other stakeholders, such as agents and parents. Future research could explore the perceptions of players as it relates to the role they hold as de facto employers of their coaching staff, as well as the traits and behaviours they value in their coaches. Secondly, as all participants were males who currently coached an ATP player (i.e., a male player) the results may only be applicable to male professional tennis coaches of male players. It would be interesting to explore the experiences of professional female coaches as it relates to coaching on the professional tennis tours, as well as coaches who coached females on the WTA tour. Thirdly, due to the small purposive sample (N = 4) of participants from the top of the men's game, it is possible that these results are not reflective of most professional tennis coaches. More specifically, it is possible that coaching players of different calibres — such as players ranked outside the top-50, or top-100 in the ATP rankings — may result in different experiences of the professional tennis tour that would result in different coach perceptions. As such, future studies could look to interview a stratified sample of professional tennis coaches who coached players from different ranking cohorts, to see if any differences emerged. Lastly, several of the coaches did not speak English as a first language, which may have resulted in answers to coach experiences being "lost in

translation" to a certain degree. Given the international footprint of the game, future studies could endeavour to interview coaches in their mother tongue to enhance the depth and accuracy of responses.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study is one of the first to explore top professional tennis coaches' perspectives on their unique coaching context. The findings extend our knowledge about the practices of successful professional coaches by adding an understudied cohort (i.e., professional tennis coaches) to the growing body of literature on this topic. While the findings of the current study may only be applicable to professional tennis coaches of male players, it offers numerous avenues for future research on the perceptions of coaches in professional tennis or other individual sports.

References

All Blacks (2023). New Zealand Rugby. Retrieved March 28th, 2023, from: https://www.allblacks.com/teams/allblacks/

Allport, G. W. (1949). *Personality: A psychological interpretation*. Henry Holt.

Anderson, J. R. (1982). Acquisition of cognitive skill. *Psychological Review, 89*(4), 369–406. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.89.4.369

Armstrong, A., Bloom, G. A., Lefebvre, J. S., & Schaefer, L. (2022). Examining how Canadian Hockey League general managers build and sustain cultures of excellence. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology, 11*(3), 320–333. https://doi.org/10.1037/spy0000295

Association of Tennis Professionals (2021). Retrieved June 5th, 2023, from: https://onevision.atptour.com/onevision/key-trends

Bennie, A., & O'Connor, D. (2010). Coaching philosophies: perceptions from professional cricket, rugby league and rugby union players and coaches in Australia. *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching, 5*(2), 309–320. https://doi.org/10.1260/1747-9541.5.2.309

Berliner, D. C. (1986). In pursuit of the expert pedagogue. *Educational Researcher, 15*(7), 5-13

Bloom, B. S. (1985). *Developing talent in young people*. Ballantine Books.

Bloom, G. A. (2012). An investigation into the coaching approach of a successful world class soccer coach: Anson Dorrance. *International Journal of Sport Science and Coaching*, *7*(3), 445-447.

Bloom, G. A., Durand-Bush, N., Schinke, R. J., & Salmela, J. H. (1998). The importance of mentoring in the development of coaches and athletes. *International Journal of Sport Psychology, 29*, 267-281.

Bloom, G. A., Falcão, W. R., & Caron, J. G. (2014). Coaching high performance athletes: Implications for coach training. In A. R. Gomes, R. Resende, & A. Albuquerque (Eds.), *Positive human functioning from a multidimensional perspective* (2nd ed., pp. 107-131). Nova Science.

Bradbury-Jones, C., Breckenridge, J., Clark, M. T., Herber, O. R., Wagstaff, C., & Taylor, J. (2017). The state of qualitative research in health and social science literature: A focused mapping review and synthesis. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *20*(6), 627-645. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1270583

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Can I use ta? Should I use ta? Should I not use ta? Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 21*(1), 37–47. https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12360

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In B. Smith & A. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 191-205). Routledge.

Campbell, S., Mills, J., Atkinson, O., Gearity, B., Kuklick, C., & McCullick, B. (2022). Engaging in paradigmatic dialogue: A bibliometric analysis of coaching scholarship from 1970 to 2020. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 10*(1), 16-28. https://doi.org/10/1123/iscj.2021-0045

Carey, L., Stone, J., & Lavallee, D. (2021). Teamwork done to a tee: A golf caddie's perspective on their perceived role and associated skills. *International Journal of Golf Science*, *9*(1).

Carter, A. D., & Bloom, G. A. (2009). Coaching knowledge and success: Going beyond athletic experiences. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, *32*(4), 419-437

Chan, J. T., & Mallett, C. J. (2011). The value of emotional intelligence for high performance coaching. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 6*(3), 315–328. https://doi.org/10.1260/1747-9541.6.3.315

Corsby, C. L., Jones, R., & Lane, A. (2022). Contending with vulnerability and uncertainty: What coaches say about coaching. *Sports Coaching Review*, *12*(3), 323-342. DOI: 10.1080/21640629.2022.2057697

Costa Jr, P. T., & McCrae, R. R. (2008). *The Revised Neo Personality Inventory (neo-pi-r).* Sage.

Côté, J., & Gilbert, W. (2009). An integrative definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 4*(3), 307–323. https://doi.org/10.1260/174795409789623892

Côté, J., Young, B., North, J., & Duffy, P. (2007). Towards a definition of excellence in sport coaching. *International Journal of Coaching Science, 1*(1), 3-17.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. Harper & Row.

Csikszentmihalyi, M., Rathunde, K. R., Whalen, S., & Wong, M. S. M. (1993). *Talented teenagers: The roots of success and failure*. Cambridge University Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Daly, K. J. (2007). *Qualitative methods for family studies and human development.* Sage.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior* (Ser. Perspectives in social psychology). Plenum.

Dohme, L-C., Bloom, G. A., & Knight, C. J. (2021). Understanding the behaviours employed by parents to support the psychological development of elite youth tennis players in

England. *International Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, *19*(6), 957-974. https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2020.1827004

Duchesne, C., Bloom, G. A., & Sabiston, C. M. (2011). Intercollegiate coaches' experiences with elite international athletes in an American sport context. *International Journal of Coaching Science*, *5*(2). 49-68.

Durand-Bush, N., & Salmela, J. H. (2002). The development and maintenance of expert athletic performance: Perceptions of world and Olympic champions. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 14*(3), 154-171. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200290103473

Epstein, D. J. (2019). *Range: Why generalists triumph in a specialized world*. Riverhead Books.

Falcão, W.R., Bloom, G.A., & Bennie, A. (2017). Coaches' experiences learning and applying the content of a humanistic coaching workshop in youth sport settings. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 4*(3), 279-290. DOI: 10.1123/iscj.2017-0027

Falcão, W.R., Bloom, G.A., Caron, J.G., & Gilbert, W.D. (2019). Youth athletes' perceptions of humanistic coaching. *International Journal of Sport Psychology, 50*(6), 523-547. DOI: 10.7352/ijsp.2019.50.523

Falcão, W. R., Bloom, G. A., & Sabiston, C. M. (2020). The impact of humanistic coach training on youth athletes' development through sport. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 15*(5-6), 610–620. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747954120933975

Fairhurst, K. E., Bloom, G. A., & Harvey, W. J. (2017). The learning and mentoring experiences of Paralympic coaches. *Disability and Health Journal*, *10*(2), 240-246. https://doi.org/10/1016/j.dhjo.2016.10.007

Fraser, M. M., Bloom, G. A., & Mallett, C. J. (2024). University serial winning coaches' experiences with low performance and maladaptive team culture. *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, 74. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2024.102677

Frost, J., Walton, C. C., Purcell, R., Fisher, K., Gwyther, K., Kocherginsky, M., & Rice, S. M. (2024). The mental health of elite-level coaches: A systematic scoping review. *Sports Medicine-Open*, *10*(1), 1-30. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40798-023-00655-8

Gibson, A. D. (2010). The Association of Tennis Professionals: From player association to governing body. *Journal of Applied Business & Economics*, *10*(5).

Gilbert, W., & Côté, J. (2013). Defining coaching effectiveness: A focus on coaches' knowledge. In Potrac, P., Gilbert, W., & Denison, J. *Routledge handbook of sports coaching* (pp. 147-159). Routledge.

Gilbert, W., Nater, S., Siwik, M., & Gallimore, R. (2010). The pyramid of teaching success in sport: Lessons from applied science and effective coaches. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action, 1*(2), 86–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/21520704.2010.528172

Gilbert, W., & Trudel, P. (2004). Analysis of coaching science research published from 1970-2001. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 75*(4), 388–399. https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.2004.10609172

Gilbert, W., & Trudel, P. (2006) 'The coach as a reflective practitioner,' in R. L. Jones (ed.) *The sports coach as educator: Re-conceptualising sports coaching*. Routledge.

Gladden, J. M., Irwin, R. L., & Sutton, W. A. (2001). Managing North American major professional sport teams in the new millennium: A focus on building brand equity. *Journal of Sport Management, 15*(4), 297-317. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.15.4.297

Glaude, M., Bloom, G. A., & Martin, L. J. (2024). An in-depth exploration of a positional subgroup in professional sport. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 36*(2), 320–341. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2023.2274456

Gordon, S., & Gucciardi, D. F. (2011). A strengths-based approach to coaching mental toughness. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, *2*(3), 143-155. https://doi.org/10/1080/21520704.2011.598222

Gould, D., Finch, L. M., & Jackson, S. A. (1993). Coping strategies used by national champion figure skaters. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 64*(4), 453–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.1993.10607599

Gould, D., Greenleaf, C., Guinan, D., & Chung, Y. (2002). A survey of U.S. Olympic coaches: Variables perceived to have influenced athlete performances and coach effectiveness. *The Sport Psychologist, 16*(3), 229–250. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.16.3.229

Gould, D., Guinan, D., Greenleaf, C., Medbery, R., & Peterson, K. (1999). Factors affecting Olympic performance: Perceptions of athletes and coaches from more and less successful teams. *The Sport Psychologist, 13*(4), 371–394. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.13.4.371

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Sage.

Gucciardi, D. F., Gordon, S., Dimmock, J. A., & Mallett, C. J. (2009). Understanding the coach's role in the development of mental toughness: Perspectives of elite Australian football coaches. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, *27*(13), 1483-1496. https://doi.org/10.1080/02640410903150475

Hägglund, K., Wagstaff, C. R. D., Kenttä, G., & Thelwell, R. (2024). Starting a conversation about vulnerability in elite sport. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action, 15*(1), 19–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/21520704.2023.2207481

Heelis, W. J., Caron, J. G., & Bloom, G. A. (2020). The experiences of high-performance coaches in the management of difficult athletes. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 51*, 101751–101751. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2020.101751

Henderson, S., Bloom, G. A., & Alexander, D. (2022). Desired coaching behaviours of elite divers during competition. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 20*(6), 1777-1794. DOI: 10.1080/1612197X.2021.2003417

Hodge, K., Henry, G., & Smith, W. (2014). A case study of excellence in elite sport: motivational climate in a world champion team. *The Sport Psychologist, 28*(1), 60–74. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2013-0037

Jamison, S., & Wooden, J. (1997). *Wooden*. McGraw-Hill.

Jowett, S. (2005). The coach-athlete partnership. *The Psychologist*, *18*(7), 412-415.

Jowett, S. (2007). Interdependence analysis and the 3 + 1Cs in the coach-athlete relationship. In S. Jowett & D. Lavallee (Eds.), *Social psychology in sport* (pp. 15-27). Human Kinetics.

Jowett, S., & Meek, G. A. (2000). The coach-athlete relationship in married couples: An exploratory content analysis. *The Sport Psychologist, 14*(2), 157–175. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.14.2.157

Jowett, S., & Wachsmuth, S. (2020). Power in coach-athlete relationships: The case of women's artistic gymnastics. In *Women's artistic gymnastics* (pp. 121-142). Routledge.

Kahlke, R. M. (2014). Generic qualitative approaches: Pitfalls and benefits of methodological mixology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *13*, 37-52. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691401300119

Karoly, P. (1993). Mechanisms of self-regulation: A systems view. *Annual Review of Psychology, 44*(1), 23-52.

Kenttä, G., Dieffenbach, K., Bentzen, M., Thompson, M., Côté, J., Mallett, C., & Olusoga, P. (2023). Position paper: Rationale for a focused attention on mental health of high-performance sports coaches. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, *1*(aop), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2022-0123

Kerr, J. M. (2015). *Legacy: 15 lessons in leadership*. Constable.

Kim, J., Bloom, G. A., & Bennie, A. (2016). Intercollegiate coaches' experiences and strategies for coaching first-year athletes. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 8*(4), 394–408. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2016.1176068

Lara-Bercial, S., & Mallett, C. J. (2016). The practices and developmental pathways of professional and Olympic serial winning coaches. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 3*(3), 221-239. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2016-0083

Lee, Y. H. (2021). The roles of different appraisals in anxiety and emotional exhaustion: A case of NCAA Division I head coaches. *American Journal of Psychology, 134*(3), 269–284. https://doi.org/10.5406/amerjpsyc.134.3.0269

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

Linley, A., Willars, J., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). *The strengths book: Be confident, be successful, and enjoy better relationships by realizing the best of you.* Coventry.

Lundkvist, E., Gustafsson, H., Hjälm, S., & Hassmén, P. (2012). An interpretative phenomenological analysis of burnout and recovery in elite soccer coaches.

Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 4(3), 400–419. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2012.693526

Lyle, J. (1999). Coaching philosophy and coaching behaviour. In Cross, N., Lyle, J. (Eds.), *The coaching process: Principles and practice of sport* (pp. 25-46). Oxford: Butterworth-Heineman.

Lyle, J. (2002). *Sports coaching concepts: a framework for coaches' behaviour*. Routledge.

Mageau G., & Vallerand, R. (2003). The coach-athlete relationship: a motivational model. *Journal of Sports Sciences, 21*(11), 883–904. https://doi.org/10.1080/0264041031000140374

Mallett, C. J. (2005). Self-determination theory: a case study of evidence-based coaching. *The Sport Psychologist, 19*(4), 417–429. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.19.4.417

Mallett, C. J., & Lara-Bercial, S. (2024). *Learning from serial winning coaches: Caring determination*. Routledge.

Mallett, C. J., & Lara-Bercial, S. (2016). Serial winning coaches: People, vision, and environment. In M. Raab, P. Wylleman, R. Seiler, A-M. Elbe, & A. Hatzigeorgiadis (Eds.), *Sport and exercise psychology research: From theory to practice* (pp. 289–322). Elsevier Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-803634-1.00014-5

McGannon, K. R., Smith, B., Kendellen, K., & Gonsalves, C. A. (2021). Qualitative research in six sport and exercise psychology journals between 2010 and 2017: An updated and expanded review of trends and interpretations. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 19*(3), 359–379. https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2019.1655779

McLean, K. N., & Mallett, C. J. (2012). What motivates the motivators? an examination of sports coaches. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy, 17*(1), 21–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2010.535201

Miller, P. S., & Kerr, G. A. (2002). Conceptualizing excellence: past, present, and future. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 14*(3), 140–153. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200290103464

Mull, B. (2019, February 8). *This is How I became a PGA Tour Caddie.* The Caddie Network. https://www.thecaddienetwork.com/mull-this-is-how-i-became-a-pga-tour-caddie/

Nash, C., Crespo, M., & Martínez-Gallego, R. (2024). Creating and sustaining a high-performing tennis culture. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, (aop), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2024-0007

New York Tennis Magazine (2018). Retrieved October 29th, 2022, from: https://newyorktennismagazine.com/coaching-honest-truth

Norris, L. A., Didymus, F. F., & Kaiseler, M. (2017). Stressors, coping, and well-being among sports coaches: A systematic review. *Psychology of Sport & Exercise, 33*, 93–112. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.08.005

Oakley, A. (2018). *The sociology of housework*. Policy Press.

Olusoga, P., & Kenttä, G. (2017). Desperate to quit: A narrative analysis of burnout and recovery in high-performance sports coaching. *The Sport Psychologist*, *31*(3), 237-248. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2016-0010

Papich, M., Bloom, G.A., L-C, Dohme. (in press). Developing close, trusting coach-athlete relationships with high performance adolescent tennis players. *International Sport Coaching Journal.*

Pietzsch, F. (2015). Athlete-coach relationships: A case study from women's professional tennis. In J. Wallis, & J. Lambert (Eds.), *Becoming a sports coach* (pp. 122-136). Routledge.

Pomerleau-Fontaine, L., Bloom, G. A., & Alexander, D. (2023). Wheelchair basketball athletes' perceptions of the coach-athlete relationship. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly, 40*(1), 105–125. https://doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2022-0003

Potrac, P., & Jones, R. L. (2009). Micropolitical Workings in Semi-Professional Football. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 26*(4), 557–577. https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.26.4.557

Prapavessis, H., & Gordon, S. (1991). Coach/player relationships in tennis. *Canadian Journal of Sports Sciences, 16*(3)*,* 229–233.

Preston, C., Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2015). Elite athletes' experiences of athlete centred coaching. *Journal of Athlete Centred Coaching, 1*(1), 81-101.

Prior, E. E., & Coates, J. K. (2020). Archers' experiences of target panic: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *12*(2), 224-241. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676x.2019.1599061

Purdy, L. G., Kohe, G. Z., & Paulauskas, R. (2019). Coaches as sport workers: professional agency within the employment context of elite European basketball. *Sport, Education and Society, 24*(2), 195–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2017.1323201

Rathwell, S., Bloom, G.A., & Loughead, T.M. (2014). Head coaches' perceptions on the roles, selection, and development of the assistant coach. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 1*(1)*,* 5-16. http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2013-0008

Rhind, D. J. A., & Jowett, S. (2010). Relationship maintenance strategies in the coach-athlete relationship: The development of the COMPASS model. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 22*(1), 106–121. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200903474472

Rhind, D. J. A., Jowett, S., & Yang, S. X. (2012). A comparison of athletes' perceptions of the coach-athlete relationship in team and individual sports. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 35*(4), 433–452. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00109

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: the art of hearing data*. Sage.

Schempp, P. G., Webster, C., McCullick, B. A., Busch, C., & Mason, I. S. (2007). How the best get better: an analysis of the self-monitoring strategies used by expert golf instructors. *Sport, Education and Society, 12*(2), 175–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573320701287502

Schinke, R. J., Bloom, G. A., & Salmela, J. H. (1995). The career stages of elite Canadian basketball coaches. *Avante*, 1, 48-62

Schlereth, N. (2015). A conceptual model explaining the employment relationship between Caddie and PGA tour golfer. *International Journal of Employment Studies, 23*(2), 26–37.

Schön D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action* (Ser. Harper Torchbooks). Basic Books.

Shrom, S. J., Cumming, J., & Fenton, S.-J. (2022). Lifestyle challenges and mental health of professional tennis players: An exploratory case study. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *21*(6), 1070-1090. https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2022.2099947

Silva, J. (2006). Psychological aspects of competition: An interview with Anson Dorrance head women's soccer coach at the University of North Carolina. *Journal of Excellence*, *11*, 88-102.

Smart, B. (2019). The world's game? Globalization and the cultural economy of tennis. In R. J. Lake (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of tennis: history, culture and politics* (pp. 96-107). (Routledge International Handbooks). Routledge.

Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2018). Developing rigor in qualitative research: Problems and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *11*(1), 101-121. https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984x.2017.1317357

Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2016). Interviews: Qualitative interviewing in the sport and exercise sciences. In Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 103-123). Routledge.

Smith, B., Sparkes, A., & Caddick, N. (2014). Judging qualitative research. In L. Nelson, R. Groom, & P. Potrac (Eds.), *Research methods in sports coaching* (pp. 192-201). Routledge.

Smith, J.A., Flower, P., & Larkin, M. (2009*). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. Sage.

Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2014). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product*. Routledge.

Tamminen, K.A., & Poucher, Z. A. (2020). Research philosophies. In Hackfort, D., & Schinke, R. (Eds.) (2020). *The Routledge international encyclopedia of sport and exercise psychology: Volume 1: Theoretical and methodological concepts* (pp. 535-550). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315187259

Tharp, A. G., & Gallimore, R., W. (1976). What a coach can teach a teacher. *Psychology Today, 9*(8), 75-78.

Urquhart, D. A., Bloom, G. A., & Loughead, T. M. (2020). The development, articulation, and implementation of a coaching vision of multiple championship–winning university ice hockey coaches. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, *7*(3), 335-346.

Vallée, C. N., & Bloom, G. A. (2016). Four keys to building a championship culture. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 2*(3), 170-177. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2016-0010

Zhu, Q., Bloom, G.A., Xu, C., Alexander-Urquhart, D., Guo, L., & Zhu, Y. (in press). Elite tennis player's perceptions of coaching effectiveness. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching.*

Appendix A – Recruitment Script

Dear _____,

My name is Hugh Clarke, and I am currently working towards a Master of Arts degree in sport psychology at McGill University under the supervision of Dr. Gordon Bloom. We would like to invite you to participate in our study exploring the coaching practices of professional tennis coaches. We are contacting you based on a set of criteria highlighting your coaching achievements at the professional level.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in a virtual interview that would last approximately 75 minutes, at a time that is convenient for you. The questions would revolve around your experiences as a professional tennis coach, and your interactions with your player(s).

The McGill University Ethics Board has reviewed and accepted this study for its adherence to ethical guidelines. All of the information provided will be confidential and the responses will only be analyzed by myself, my supervisor Dr. Gordon Bloom, and the research team. The interpretations and results will be sent back to you after the interview to ensure for accuracy and to allow you the opportunity to clarify any of your answers.

Should you have any questions concerning this study, please contact myself or my supervisor using the information provided at the bottom of the page. The McGill Sport Psychology Research Laboratory has a history of producing influential research on sport coaching and leadership. Please visit our website if you would like to learn more about our research: https://www.mcgill.ca/sportpsych/.

Thank you for considering participating in this research project, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Hugh Clarke

Hugh Clarke, B.A (Hons)
Master's Candidate, Sport Psychology
Dept. of Kinesiology & PE
McGill University, Montreal
hugh.clarke2@mail.mcgill.ca

Gordon A. Bloom, Ph. D.
Full Professor
Dept. of Kinesiology & PE
McGill University, Montreal
gordon.bloom@mcgill.ca

Appendix B – Informed Consent Form

This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts for Hugh Clarke, a current graduate student in sport psychology in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education at McGill University. You are invited to participate in the research study entitled: "Exploring coaching practices in professional tennis." If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to partake in a 75-minute, video and audio recorded virtual interview, without compensation. During the interview, you will be asked questions regarding your experiences as a coach of professional tennis players.

At the end of the interview, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions or make any additional comments that were not discussed throughout the interview. Your identity will **remain confidential at all times** and the primary researcher, Hugh Clarke, and the faculty supervisor, Dr. Gordon Bloom, will be the only individuals with access to a copy of the responses. All of the data, including the recorded copy of the interview and the consent form will be stored in an encrypted folder on a password-protected computer for seven years. Any paper copies of notes will be converted into digital files and destroyed at the end of the study. The information gathered from the study will be used solely for conference presentations and journal article publications and your confidentiality will be maintained and respected throughout the entirety of the process. **Your participation in this study is voluntary and not mandatory, therefore you have the ability to refuse to answer any questions without penalty and if you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, all information attained up until that point will be destroyed.**

After reading the above statements you can now provide consent to voluntarily agree to participate in this research study based on the terms outlined in this consent form. You will be provided with a signed copy of this consent form. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding your rights and welfare as a participant in this research study, please feel free to contact lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca or at 514-398-6831. Please sign below if you agree to participate:

_____ _____

Signature Date

I agree **(CHECK YES □ OR NO □)** to the visual and audio recording of the virtual interviews with the understanding that these recordings will be used solely for the purpose of transcribing these sessions.

Hugh Clarke, B.A. (Hons)
Master's Candidate, Sport Psychology
Dept. of Kinesiology & PE
McGill University, Montreal
hugh.clarke2@mail.mcgill.ca

Gordon A. Bloom, Ph.D.
Full Professor
Dept. of Kinesiology & PE
McGill University, Montreal
gordon.bloom@mcgill.ca

Appendix C – Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Pre-Interview Routine

- Introduction of the researcher
- Overview of the study
- Consent form

Opening Questions

1. Briefly tell me about your athletic career.

2. Briefly describe your journey to becoming a tennis coach of a professional player.
    a. How many top 200 ranked players have you coached?
    b. Academic background
    c. Coach education background
    d. How did you meet and end up in a coaching role with your current player?

Key Questions

3. What are some unique challenges in professional tennis that make coaching difficult?
    a. How do you try to navigate these challenges?
    b. How often do you get to see/travel with your player?
    c. Employment / contractual aspects
    d. Do you have any stories that illustrate some of these challenges?

4. How are performance decisions made with your player?
    a. Tournament scheduling
    b. Technical and tactical skills
    c. Short and long-term goal setting

5. What does ‘connecting to a player’ mean to you?
    a. How important is it to be close with your player?
    b. What are some strategies you use to connect with a player?
    c. Who is in charge of the “team” culture (despite small teams/groups)

6. What are some challenges you have encountered when trying to build a relationship with your players?
    a. What did you learn from these experiences as it relates to:
        i. Difficult athletes
        ii. Emotional athletes
        iii. Injured athletes
        iv. Athletes with a poor work ethic
        v. During phases of low confidence in the athlete
        vi. With athletes experiencing burnout
        vii. Navigating other relationships in the athlete’s life (e.g., girlfriend, parents, sponsors, federations, etc.)

7. What are some of the best practices you've seen other coaches use that enhances their coach-athlete relationships?
    a. In tennis? In other sports? It can be anyone.
    b. Can you give me a story of another coach that illustrates this well?
    c. Why do you think those practices were so useful for enhancing their relationship?

8. What sorts of things off the court do you think will influence your players' performance on the court?
    a. Positive influences
    b. Negative influences
    c. Holistic athlete development

9. Do you try to develop your player outside of tennis (life skills), and if so, what sorts of things do you do to achieve this?
    a. Values
    b. Encouraging other pursuits (education/business)

10. How did you develop your coaching philosophy?
    a. What key experiences influenced this?
    b. Has it changed over time? If yes, how and why?

Summary Questions

11. What do you think are the most important behaviours and values of a good coach?

Concluding Questions

12. Is there something that we didn't cover in the interview that you would you like to add?

13. Is there any significant life event outside of coaching that may have impacted your coaching career?

14. Do you have any final questions or comments you would like to share?

Probes: Key phrases to stimulate reflection

- Can you expand on that?
- Can you clarify that?
- That's interesting, tell me more about that.
- Could you please tell me more about this?
- Could you provide an anecdote of how this happened?

Appendix D – Codes, Themes, and Overarching Themes

CODES	THEMES	OVERARCHING THEMES
1. Coach inexperience (4) 2. Excessive Travel (6) 3. Length of season (2) 4. Scheduling (13)	1. Environmental challenges (25): Description of challenges due to the professional tennis tour	1. Professional tennis environment (63): Contextual features of the professional tennis tour that present distinct coaching challenges to tennis coaches
1. Business of tennis (9) 2. Coach contract (11) 3. Coach financial freedom (2) 4. Coach reputation (5) 5. Fearful coaching (2) 6. Parents (7) 7. Social media (2)	2. Who's the boss? (38): Coaches' experiences dealing with the unique power-dynamic with their player.	
1. Coach philosophy (9) 2. Coaching team (9) 3. Coach vision (2) 4. Fostering player autonomy (10) 5. Passion for tennis (3) 6. Strategizing for success (4)	1. Organisation and leadership (37): How coaches plan and establish optimal conditions conducive to player development and success	2. Professional tennis coaching (120): Beliefs, knowledge, and strategies used by professional tennis coaches to develop players on and off court.
1. Athlete mindset (15) 2. Athlete social experiences (5) 3. Establishing expectations (8) 4. Harmony with athlete (17) 5. Trust (7)	2. Relationship building (52): The application of interpersonal coaching knowledge to better understand their player	

1. Coaching competencies (13) 2. Coaching feedback (6) 3. Technical feedback (9) 4. Watching tennis (3)	3. Training the player (31): The application of coaching knowledge to improve technical, tactical, and mental skills	