Examining the barriers and facilitators of the junior to senior transition experience in Australian tennis: An in-depth analysis of the journey towards a professional tennis career

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Within the elite sporting experience, successful transitioning between key points in an athlete’s career appears critical (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Specifically in the sport of tennis, successful negotiation of the transition from junior to senior competition underpins a successful professional tennis career. Whilst a great deal of anecdotal evidence exists (Dewhurst, 2007; Draper, 2011), there is scant empirical evidence detailing the factors which facilitate or constrain a successful transition from junior to senior professional tennis. In order to maximise current and future talent development, an examination of why some elite junior athletes do not make the transition to a successful professional tennis career (i.e. Top 100 ATP ranking) is warranted. Utilising evidence sourced from interviews with past elite Australian players (Top 100 ATP ranked athletes and those with an ATP ranking greater than 100) key factors and characteristics that influenced their developmental pathways and transition were explored. Interview data were analysed using methods compatible with Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and developmental milestone data was analysed statistically using SPSS software (Version 15). Preliminary data revealed that being a Top 100 ATP player required a favourable mix of psychological characteristics as well extrinsic factors related to organisational support. Final findings will be presented in the form of a full conceptual model highlighting the interaction of emergent intrinsic and extrinsic factors that contribute to the transition experience and ultimately attainment of Top 100 ATP ranking. Information gained from this investigation will be utilised to inform and refine current and future developmental practices, resource and support provision and policy specific to the sport of tennis.