

The Importance of Self-Regulatory Skills during the Junior to Senior Transition in Australian Tennis

Alicia Mathews^{1,2}, Damian Farrow^{1,2}, Clare MacMahon³, Juanita Weissensteiner²

1. Victoria University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

2. Australian Institute of Sport, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, Australia

3. Swinburne University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Self-regulation or the extent to which learners exert control over their own learning to master a specific task and improve (Zimmerman, 1989) has recently been argued to be a key psychological discriminator between successful and unsuccessful elite athletes (Jonker, Elferink-Gemser, & Visscher, 2010). This study utilised evidence sourced from semi –structured interviews with retired elite Australian tennis players who were divided into Top 100 ATP ranked athletes (considered successful) and those with an ATP ranking greater than 100 (considered less successful). Participants were interviewed to gain retrospective information on their individual developmental pathways and transition experiences to a professional career, specifically investigating the attributes and factors they thought either facilitated or constrained their developmental progress and ultimately their professional ATP ranking. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that a favourable and complementary mix of intrinsic (i.e., intrapersonal skills and attributes of the player) and extrinsic factors (coaching, support provision etc.) underpinned a successful career. One of the major discriminators that separated the two cohorts was the self regulatory skills which were most evident in the Top 100 ATP ranked players. These athletes commonly expressed having an ownership of their game through an awareness of their personal strengths and weaknesses and knew exactly what was required to succeed. The Top 100 ATP ranked athletes addressed and worked on their own identified limitations and sought the required support such as the “right” coach to assist their development. Discussion will centre on how information and insights gained from this investigation can be utilised to inform and refine current and future developmental practices within a sports system.

Jonker, L., Elferink-Gemser, M. T., & Visscher, C. (2010). Differences in self-regulatory skills among talented athletes: The significance of competitive level and type of sport. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 28(28), 901-908.

Zimmerman, B. J. (1989). A social cognitive view of self regulated academic learning *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81, 329-339.