

Developing a talented young player

This briefing note provides a guide for parents on what to do if you think your child has a particular talent at tennis.

So, let's start at the beginning.

Why do I think my child is particularly talented?

Let's face it we all think our children are the best ever. Because they are of course. But in this note we want to look at how a particular talent in the game of tennis might be identified and then developed.



OK I get that but I really do think my child is a tennis talent?

If you think you have a real tennis talent on your hands, get a second opinion. You can do this by talking to a tennis coach, preferably at an LTA registered club, where they have an LTA accredited coach who will be able to take look at your player and give you an honest assessment. They will be able to compare them with other children in their age group, hit with them, see them in action and advise whether you are right. What you think is important but not as important as what your child thinks. It is extremely important that the child falls in love with the game at a young age and the right support from the parent/carer is of utmost importance.

Can my child be too young to be a talent?

Most coaches with programmes for youngsters will have squads starting at around 5 or 6 years old. At the outset, they will be playing mini tennis with a

soft ball, and playing with others in mixed gender groups. This is a great introduction into the game.

What if my child is older than that?

That is still ok. Coaching groups go up in age groups, or actually usually in different ball types from, sponge ball through various coloured ball stages to the full, normal tennis ball that you will be familiar with.

Do I have to work through a coach and a club?

Well you could go it alone if you think you have the ability to develop them properly. But developing a player is a specialist task for a skilled coach and players need others to play with and against to develop their skills both social and on court. Also, working with a club coach will link you in to the county and national structure for player development in the UK. (See our note on County Training) <https://www.lta.org.uk/play-compete/performance-tennis-players/player-pathway/>



What will it cost?

There is no getting away from the fact that it will require you to make a significant financial commitment if your child goes all the way to the top of the national rankings. Typically, a coach will cost £25-£35 per hour for an individual lesson although group lessons can be much cheaper. On top of that you will need to buy good quality equipment, pay for conditioning training, diet advice, and arrange and pay for transport and accommodation for training sessions, competitions etc. And remember, if you are starting with your child at 5, it will be 15 years at least before they are competing for prize money of any significance to your budget.

What are the chances of my child making it to the top of the game?

Slim. Only the best of the best get to the top, by which we mean the top 100 in the world. Many good players can of course make their living from playing at a reasonable level, and through becoming professional coaches themselves. But to get to the absolute top requires a special talent and a significant commitment of time and effort over a long time, likely to be in excess of ten years before the player and the parent knows whether or not a player has really got a chance of 'making it'. Parents must be aware that children do fall away from the Performance Pathway for many reasons such as injury, loss of interest, not sufficient talent or inadequate physical development.

How can I best support my child?

You will not be the first and you probably won't be the last parent who wants to get the balance right between support and encouragement for your loved one. You too will need to stay close to the coaching team you choose and will also probably want to take advice and counselling offered by the LTA. This link will be helpful <https://www.lta.org.uk/play-compete/getting-started/information-for-parents/>



So, what would you advise?

As we said at the start. Go to an LTA registered club, with an accredited coach and seek their advice. They will want to help. We all want new players in the game and even if your child is not the next world number one, you might find they and you love the game and want to play it. While we have tried to paint a realistic picture of the journey and challenges of becoming a top player, tennis is a sport for life and contributes significantly to anyone's overall development. The prize for 'making it' is enormous and we hope your

child is the one that does so think of it initially of a development opportunity rather than a sole journey to the top.