



TEEN DROPOUT in TENNIS

THE ISSUE

Tennis has a well-known issue with player drop out, particularly at the teenage stage. This is an important issue for tennis clubs to tackle. According to the 'Irish Times', *"Serious health problems begin as activity slows in teens. Lifestyle behaviours tend to track from childhood to adulthood. Children who are unfit and overweight in their teenage years will likely be unfit and overweight as adults"*. Meanwhile, Professor Niall Moyna of DCU writes: *"Research into children with low levels of fitness has found evidence of heart disease in the arteries of 15 year-old's. The same children were also found to have high cholesterol, blood pressure and fat levels"*.

From the club's perspective, many of your teenage members will have been members for some years. It's a great pity to lose members who have gained expertise in the game, leaving the club forced to find new members to replace them.

CAUSES OF DROP OUT

In order to fight the issue, we need to understand the causes. Common reasons for young players leaving the sport include:

1. Part-time job.
2. Homework and exams.
3. Internet and phone-based activities.
4. Expense.
5. Low levels of parental support.
6. Perceived levels of competence.
7. Overly regimented training sessions – no opportunity to express their creativity.
8. 'Mismatches' – being asked to play with/against people who are at too high or too low a standard.
9. Not enjoying it: "in a recent study about girls' decisions to continue in sport, enjoyment was the only significant factor in predicting intention to continue for the next 6-12 months".
10. Pressure to perform and associated injuries (overtraining).

RESEARCH, SURVEYS, QUOTES...

QUOTES FROM TEENAGERS:

- “The game becomes too serious”.
- “All the pressure is on one person”.
- “Tennis is less sociable than other sports”.



FEMALE DROP OUT

During the teenage years, more girls than boys leave sport, including tennis.

“In some nations, female teenage participation in tennis is only 25% of male participation”.

“91% (of girls) cited private cubicles as a must-have”.

“The survey of more than 2,000 schoolchildren aged between eight and 16 found that many held worrying attitudes about exercise, especially young girls, a third of whom said they avoided playing sport because they felt self-conscious and embarrassed while taking part”.

Reported barriers to teenage female participation:

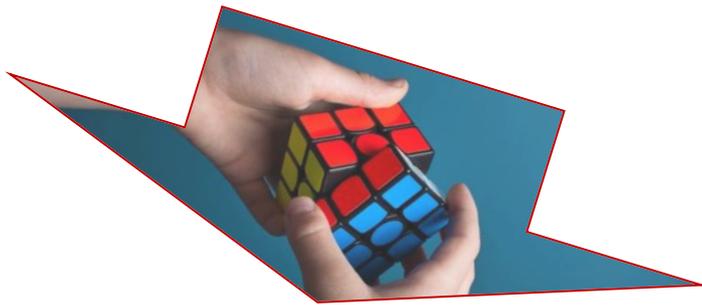
- “I’m not good enough”.
- “Only the talented are valued”.
- Lack of confidence over body image and appearance.
- School/exam pressures.
- Pressure from friends who don’t participate.
- “Sport is for boys”.
- Lack of active female role models (media coverage).
- Meeting new people (young people more comfortable on social media).
- “63% of young women wouldn’t play sport or exercise without a friend by their side”.

Results of survey of primary school children: The Ten Most Important Reasons Why I Play My Best Sport:

1. To have fun;
2. To improve my skills;
3. To stay in shape;
4. To do something I am good at;
5. For the excitement of competition;
6. To get exercise;
7. To play as part of a team;
8. For the challenge of competition;
9. To learn new skills;
10. To win.

Reported barriers to adult female participation:

- Not being fit enough
- Not being good enough
- Not being competitive/serious enough
- Not knowing the rules
- Not knowing what equipment to bring
- Holding back the group
- Being too good
- Being seen as too competitive/serious.



ON-COURT SOLUTIONS

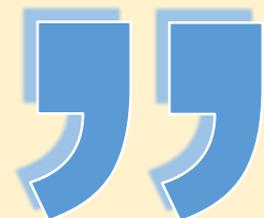
1. Arrange plenty of competitive opportunities at the appropriate level, but without pressure to win. Organise lots of team events, which have an inherent social aspect.
2. Teenagers can be encouraged to get more involved in assisting the club coach if they take the Tennis Ireland Play and Stay Assistant course.
3. The tennis club could partner with another club (hockey, basketball, soccer), and arrange mutual visits to try each other's sport. This increases the opportunities for socializing.
4. Experiment with separate boys and girls on-court sessions, with a social aspect afterwards that mixes the boys and girls together.
5. To help with body-consciousness, encourage teenagers to wear clothing that they are comfortable in.
6. Provide young players with an opportunity to support and mentor other younger members, as well as each other.
7. Young players need to be in a stimulating and engaging environment. Organize the coaching around the Games Based Approach ("Learn the game by playing the game" - maximise activity and experience, minimize standing around).
8. Implement the best possible coaching programme. Good coaching equals fast improvement and therefore ongoing motivation to keep playing tennis.
9. Ensure that from the day they start, players find it as easy as possible to become competent and comfortable on court. This is achieved by starting out and progressing with the correct equipment (Tennis 10s programme). Coaches will be using this equipment – it also needs to be available for practice/free play.

SUCCESS from Badminton England:

"As a 13-year old girl put it: 'It's a boring, dull activity that old people do – it's not for my age group.' So, how could Badminton England break down the barriers – what would attract young girls to badminton?"

The answers: mates, music, badminton challenges, high energy, fun, sociable, interactive, make up your own rules...The sessions were facilitated and not coached and there was a high degree of autonomy and no competition.

They were delivered at 1,200 venues to 40,000 young people, 56% of whom were girls. They put strong emphasis on the activators being welcoming and demonstrating the ability to be engaging with young people, motivational, sociable and interactive and deliver sessions that are high energy and fun".



OFF-COURT SOLUTIONS

1. Any programme for teenagers benefits from an inherent online aspect. When players participate there should be an outlet and encouragement for them to share it with their friends, increasing the sense of identity and loyalty, whilst as a by-product marketing directly to a relevant age group.

2. Many young people have concerns about the environment. A group could be put in charge of ensuring that the club meets high standards in terms of recycling and environmental impact.

3. Consult the players about what they want from the club. Form an advisory committee of teenagers. Young people need to feel they have a degree of autonomy, and a voice in how the club is run, especially in how it relates to them.

More information on this and related issues in the Tennis Ireland document 'Club Teen Tennis 2021 – Implementation'.

4. To deal with parental pressure – educate the parents. A study of girls' continuation in sport (Atkins, Johnson, Force & Petrie, 2013) found that where they perceived their parents as involved, warm and supportive, they reported higher levels of sport competence.

5. Teenagers are very concerned with feeling safe and respected. They are keen to avoid embarrassing situations- for example being subjected to sarcasm. Ensure that everyone who interacts with teenagers at the club understands these potential issues.

6. Praise effort more than outcomes. The feeling of not being good enough often stems from having too big an emphasis on performance targets and results. When focus is on the required effort (which will ultimately lead to success) it allows athletes to take the pressure off, build the right skills and ultimately enjoy their sport for years to come.

7. In very many cases, her mother is a key influence on a girl. We should influence mothers to engage with their daughters on the importance of sport, and get involved themselves.

8. Female Coaches: Worldwide 47% of people who play tennis are female. Equalization is close. However, only 21% of tennis coaches are female (ITF).

9. Appoint a male and female adult to act on the Executive Committee as Youth Development Coordinators for the club. These volunteers should create a strong link with the Advisory Committee of teenagers.

"An interesting fact is that where I've got a female head coach, for instance at the Belbroughton Tennis Club, the percentage of female players is higher than at other clubs which have an all-male coaching team".



NEED FURTHER GUIDANCE?

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