

COACH BURNOUT

Coaches are constantly on the lookout for signs of burnout in their players – but who's looking out for the coaches? **DR. SARAH MORANTE** highlights the warning signs of burnout and how you can prevent them from occurring.

Most coaches plan their training program to prevent burnout in their players and then look out for any early warning signs that may indicate burnout is looming. However, in our attempts to maximize income and in providing the highest quality service to our clients, we may in fact be the ones in real danger of suffering burnout. It is important that coaches work smartly in order to avoid the harmful effects of burnout and thus prolong our careers.

After all, a fit and healthy body is as important to a tennis coach as is a hammer to a builder, a spanner to a mechanic or a pair of scissors to a hairdresser – this essential piece of equipment must be maintained.

CAUSES OF BURNOUT

Burnout, or overtraining, results from an imbalance between the physical and mental strains caused by the workload compared with the adaptation and restoration that occurs during recovery. When the strains exceed the recovery, there is insufficient time for the body to repair the damaged tissues or for the mind to “unwind”. If this occurs over a prolonged period of time, these physical and mental strains will become noticeable as symptoms of burnout.

Strain ⇨ recovery ⇨ burnout

Strain = recovery ⇨ adaptation

Burnout can therefore result from a workload (strain) that is too high and/or recovery that is inadequate. Firstly, if the workload (comprised of the duration, intensity and frequency of work) is too great, the strains experienced may be too large to be repaired in the normal time frame. This could easily occur in a tennis coach who works most days of the week for a number of hours each day and at a reasonably high intensity.

The second major cause of burnout is inadequate recovery duration or quality. If the time between sessions is too short, complete repair and restoration of strains caused by the workload cannot be achieved. Similarly, if the recovery quality is poor due to factors such as bad diet, insufficient sleep or other lifestyle stressors, adequate recovery will not be achieved. This is likely to be the major cause of burnout in tennis coaches since we aim to teach as many hours as possible in order to build a career yet we pay little or no attention to recovering from the physical and mental strains of this type of work.

Since workload and recovery must be balanced to avoid burnout, both can be increased proportionally while we still avoid burnout. In other words, a high workload can be tolerated

if it is complemented by an equal amount of quality recovery. Whilst this description of the overall workload or strain versus recovery is very ambiguous, so too is overtraining in that it varies widely between individuals. One coach may struggle with three hour-long sessions on four days of the week while another coach may be fresh after forty hours of lessons covering every day of the week. This is because there are a number of variables that influence a person's work tolerance.

While the physiological and psychological responses to work are complicated, fortunately the solution to managing your own workload and recovery is much simpler – listen to your body! When you begin to sense some of the signs and symptoms of overtraining or burnout, it is essential that either the workload or recovery is corrected in order to prevent this condition from spiraling into something more chronic and serious.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

There are a number of characteristic signs and symptoms reported that describe overtraining and burnout. Most if not all research has examined athletes when studying overtraining and burnout. However, it is reasonable to compare an athlete to a tennis coach who must be physically and mentally active throughout all sessions and who works as many, if not more, hours a week as an athlete trains and competes. Furthermore, it is probable that many tennis coaches have experienced or will experience most of these symptoms at some stage in their careers.

Physiological/physical signs and symptoms:

- Persistent muscle soreness and heaviness.
- Joint and headaches.
- Increased susceptibility to sore throats, colds and other illnesses.
- Reduced energy levels.
- Elevated resting heart rate or heart palpitations.
- Recurrence of niggling injuries.
- Insomnia and sleep disturbances (unrefreshing sleep).
- Loss of appetite.

Psychological / behavioral signs and symptoms:

- Low motivation.
- Poor concentration.
- Increased irritability.
- Mood swings.

These symptoms are likely to appear at the latter stages of the school term and be relieved by school holidays. Alternatively,

they may appear towards the end of each week and be relieved by the weekend. It is also possible that they are present on most days but that the coach ignores the symptoms and pushes through to experience a "second wind" where energy levels are heightened, and fatigue and soreness disappear during the work period. However, this is simply the body kicking in to its stress energy reserves, with adrenaline and cortisol being released to cope with the workload. However, the body cannot function this way in the long term, instead leading to more serious illness and injury.

Therefore, tennis coaches must be aware of these warning signs for overtraining and burnout, and take swift corrective action to the workload or recovery if they appear.

The following questionnaire is a commonly used technique for identifying and monitoring the signs and symptoms of overtraining or burnout.

	Better than Normal	Normal	Worse than Normal
General health			
General fitness			
Appetite			
Effort in work			
Quality of sleep			
Feelings toward others			
Recovery time			
Stiffness/soreness			
Enthusiasm for work			
Feeling bored			
Irritability/mood			

PREVENTING OR MANAGING BURNOUT

Prevention or management strategies for burnout should relate to the causes – workload and recovery. Simply reducing the duration or frequency of work is not generally an option for tennis coaches who are committed to a schedule and requiring work for income. Therefore, coaches need to plan lessons effectively to minimize strain and promote recovery:

- **Reduce the intensity within a session.** Consider your own exertion during more intense sessions and find ways to reduce this intensity (e.g., more ball-feeding drills, tactical planning, mental skills training, etc).
- **Increase the recovery between sessions.** Schedule some higher and lower intensity sessions on the one day to increase the recovery time between lessons compared to poor scheduling in which high intensity sessions are placed back-to-back on the same day.
- **Increase the recovery between days.** Plan for light intensity days or days off.



Players are not the only ones in danger of burnout on the court.

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Outside of the workload, tennis coaches can invest some time towards essential recovery strategies that will not only improve their state of wellbeing but increase their performance and income-earning capacity:

- **Active rest.** Activities such as cross-training, stretching, aerobic exercise at 60% effort and water workouts.
- **Passive rest.** 7 to 9 hours sleep each night.
- **Nutrition.** High carbohydrate diet with high GI foods consumed immediately after exercise, plenty of water, minimal processed foods, minimal high fat and high protein meals, minimal caffeine, nicotine and alcohol, plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables
- **Massage.** Regular sports or remedial massages and post-exercise massage of active muscles.
- **Contrast baths/showers or ice baths.** Alternating between hot and cold water temperatures at 30 second intervals or spending 3 to 15 minutes in an ice bath or cold water.
- **Mental relaxation.** Deep breathing exercises, meditation, yoga, floatation, music, other activities that help the mind "de tune".
- **Lifestyle and non-exercise stressors.** Minimise work, study or relationship stresses, minimize excessive physical activity in non-work time. ●

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