

# 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.

**M**ost 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,

