

Tennis for Health

Performance was once the prime objective for players, but now general health and fitness are also taking priority. **DR SARAH MORANTE** reports on how coaches can benefit from this changing community focus.

As a coach, our business centres around improving the performance of our clients, regardless of whether they play socially or competitively. However various factors have combined to alter the characteristics of the community, which consequently influence the role of the tennis coach. Therefore coaches need to think about the services they provide, and the objectives of their coaching and the client. More than likely, our businesses could be expanded to attract a broader segment of the community by providing a service that taps into current and future community issues.

Diversification of the Coach

While it has been long recognized that there are numerous roles involved in being a tennis coach – such as teacher, friend and mentor – the major, if not sole, objective of coaching is to enhance the client's performance. This has been client-driven, in that it is the client's expectation that coaching will improve their tennis ability. In fact, coaches are threatened with clients taking their business elsewhere if their performance objectives are not achieved. Therefore, coaches have concentrated on advancing their knowledge and experience in relation to creating the most biomechanically efficient technique, the strongest tactical strategies, the fittest player and the player with the toughest mental skills. This traditional, performance-enhancement approach to coaching will always be the major role of a tennis coach, however the modern coach could benefit from diversifying their coaching objectives in response to a changing client.

In recent decades there has been a shift in community values from skilled sports performance to health and fitness. The obesity epidemic, increases in the incidence of preventable lifestyle diseases and the ageing population call for greater emphasis on health and well-being rather than skilled sports performance.

Additionally, the "Y generation", who generally demand immediate results with as little work as possible, are less likely to persist with the long-term training required to improve tennis skills. This, along with their over-consumption of television and video games, means obesity and lifestyle disease are also issues for children and young adults. The modern tennis coach would therefore benefit from combining their traditional roles with that of health promotion. This will not only enable tennis coaches to assist in battling this serious community concern but also attract an entirely new client base to tennis coaching, thereby increasing income potential.

Health Benefits

Latest statistics reveal that one in six Australians is classified as obese, with that statistic expected to rise to one in three predicted by 2025. Obesity is a serious public concern, as it



Andy Murray inspires kids to be healthier and fitter.

GETTY IMAGES

is a major risk factor for numerous health problems and thus presents an unnecessary economic burden. Some of the health concerns associated with obesity have recently reported:

- More than 1 million Australians suffer type 2 diabetes with another 102,000 new cases diagnosed every year, leading to double the current statistic by 2030
- 3.5 million Australians (1 in 6 people) suffer cardiovascular disease plus 379,000 new cases diagnosed every year result in a projection of 1 in 4 by 2050
- 20,000 cases of cancer and 225,000 cases of osteoarthritis reported in Australia each year
- Every year public hospitals treat 500,000 individuals whilst over 50,000 people die from preventable illnesses caused by their poor lifestyle

Inadequate physical activity, along with poor diet, is a major cause of obesity. Current recommendations suggest all people undertake at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week. However, this is obviously not being achieved. Many individuals either cannot or are unwilling to participate in traditional forms of exercise such as walking, swimming or going to the gym. Negative previous experiences of these activities cause people to remain inactive. Intimidation



and expense of gyms, and boredom and security concerns of walking are just some of the reasons behind the sedentary lifestyle among many Australians.

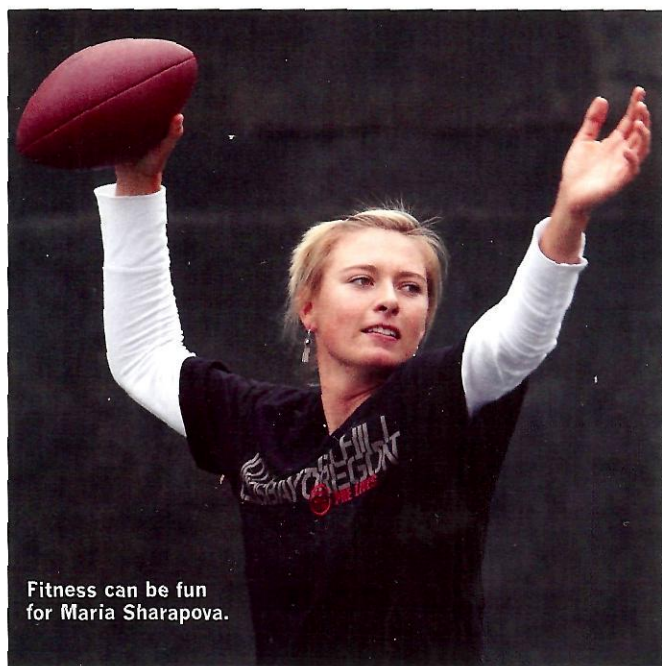
Unlike exercise training for fitness or some other sports, tennis presents individuals with a unique environment that is likely to enhance long-term adherence, thereby improving health benefits throughout life – evidence of this is shown by the number of men and women enjoying tennis well into their 80s. Tennis is a popular sport among both genders, and across all age groups, demographics and nationalities. It is a sport that can be played throughout the lifespan as a competitive or social activity with friends or family. Tennis is a skill based activity which provides a stimulus for ongoing improvement and motivation, in addition to being relatively affordable. Therefore, tennis presents a motivating and challenging activity that boasts its own health properties similar to the traditional exercises. This makes tennis a suitable component of an individual's attainment of the recommended physical activity quota.

Some of the health benefits reported in response to regular tennis participation include:

- **Metabolism** – Improved insulin sensitivity, which is helpful for the prevention and management of type 2 diabetes.
- **Musculoskeletal system** – 1) Increased lean body mass and basal energy expenditure, 2) Improved muscle strength, power and endurance for daily function and 3) Increased bone mineral density for the prevention of osteoporosis.
- **Weight management** – Lower body fat levels since singles tennis burns approximately 53 kJ per minute, which equates to 3,180 kJ for one hour of play (or half of a family block of chocolate!).
- **Cardiovascular system** – Lower resting heart rate and blood pressure, which helps reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.
- **Respiratory system** – Improved lung function and management of respiratory disorders such as asthma.
- **Psychology** – Improved emotional well-being and reduced depression.

Application for Coaches

Tennis coaching has always centred on participation for performance, regardless of the standard and goals of the student. This coaching objective, combined with the potential for a perceived competitive focus, is likely to have excluded many individuals from starting or continuing tennis. Potential clients may never commence tennis for fear of failing at a new skill, while previous clients may have discontinued for lack of



DAVID SILVERMAN, GETTY IMAGES

improvement or non-competitive traits. Thus, tennis coaches are relying on a very specific service that will attract only a certain number of clients.

Current tennis participation statistics are reflective of the population being involved in less physical activity than ever before. The number of tennis courts available has reduced significantly in the past years yet these fewer available tennis courts are so often empty. In contrast, the trend in the fitness industry is the opposite – fitness centres and fitness instructors are now busier than ever. This suggests that community objectives have changed and are more concerned with health, fitness, wellbeing and appearance rather than sport and competition.

Tennis coaches would benefit from diversifying their business services by offering classes that focus on health and fitness instead of performance. This would attract a new client base to tennis, in addition to improving the retention of existing clientele. By gaining knowledge and skills relating to health and fitness, coaches can incorporate different activities into regular tennis lessons and provide specific classes devoted to physical activity. Such classes would prove lucrative by filling quiet parts of the day (e.g., ladies, older adults or school classes during the day) or by increasing the hourly rate of pay through a number of clients.

Coaches are therefore encouraged to seek professional development outside of the core tennis duties and branch into the growing health and fitness industry. This expansion should prove rewarding both personally and financially. ●

Dr Sarah Morante is a sports physiologist and TCA Advanced Coach, who specializes in the applied science of tennis.

