

ELITE TENNIS PLAYER CHECKLIST





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Pursuing tennis at an elite level can be one of the most exciting and rewarding journeys a person can go on. The thrill of competing often brings to the surface every human emotion possible and can provide huge amounts of joy for both players and parents.

“I love tennis! I’ve always felt like this because it is such a classy sport with a great, competitive flair to it.”

-Roger Federer

Players who strive to reach world class levels of the game often develop an incredibly strong work ethic and the personal qualities needed to be successful in any area of life. It can also provide some incredible life-enhancing opportunities such as world travel or a free private school or U.S. College education via tennis scholarships. Tennis is also one of the healthiest, least injurious sports that people can play.

For players aspiring to reach an elite level, an effective player development plan needs to be created that considers the many facets of tennis. Parents are usually responsible for making all of the decisions with regard to this plan including areas such as training, coaching and tournament schedules. Parents without elite tennis or coaching backgrounds can find navigating this journey difficult, which can often lead to poor decisions, that can affect their child’s potential.

This checklist is designed to provide guidance on the essential components that are required for a player to reach the elite levels of the game.



TRAINING HOURS

In 1993 Anders Ericson developed a theory that it takes around 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to become world class in any field. The underlying message of over 30 years of research in this area is that talent doesn't matter – practice does.

For example Tiger Woods started to hit thousands of golf balls before the age of 2, Mozart had done 3500 hours of practice by age 6 and Andre Agassi was hitting 1 million balls per year as a junior.

Whilst the above examples may be extreme, the principle is that Elite tennis players need thousands of quality hours on court to build up the fitness and skills needed to compete at a high level. Simply put, the more quality hours you put in on court, the better you will become.

If your child is looking to pursue professional tennis, they will need to clock up at least 10,000 hours on court. A simple way of working towards this target is to start young and train the number of hours of your age each week.

ELITE PLAYER TRAINING HOURS							
Age 3: 3 Hours	Age 4: 4 Hours	Age 5: 5 Hours	Age 6: 6 Hours	Age 7: 7 Hours	Age 8: 8 Hours	Age 9: 9 Hours	Age 10: 10 Hours
Age 11: 11 Hours	Age 12: 12 Hours	Age 13: 13 Hours	Age 14: 14 Hours	Age 15: 15 Hours	Age 16: 16 Hours	Age 17: 17 Hours	Age 18: 18 Hours

Whilst this is a guide, there are two important things to keep in mind:

1. Increasing the training load gradually allows time for a child's body to slowly adapt to a large training volume. Repetitive injuries are the Number 1 reason why players can't train the recommended number of hours. Players need to take good care of their bodies. As a player gets older, limiting total training hours to around 18-20 hours per week, can reduce the chances of injury and keep the training quality high.
2. It's important to align your child's training volume with their goals. Our research shows that players looking to play at a U.S. College Tennis Scholarship level will only need to train 60%-90% of these hours depending on whether your child is male or female and what type of College they are looking to go to.





MATCH PLAY QUANTITY

Playing a high volume of competitive matches is one of the most beneficial things a player can do to develop their game. Without exception, the best players in any country have a very high match count.

Players should seek to play matches against opponents of a similar level, resulting in a competitive score line. The more competitive matches you can play, the better match player you become. A couple of reasons for this are:

- Tactically, players become more intelligent and begin to pick up on common patterns that opponents use and start reading the play earlier and earlier over time.
- Physically, players' bodies become accustomed to the intensity, rhythm and duration of competitive matches and over time build up a strong tolerance to deal with all of the physical demands.
- Mentally, players become accustomed to handling the ups and downs of matches and high pressure situations. Players who don't compete often tend to panic and play the big points poorly whilst experienced match players tend to stay more composed and execute more effectively under pressure.
- Statistically: 70% of all points are won/lost in the first 4 shots which make the serve +1 and return +1 the most important shots in tennis. A lot of training sessions don't devote a lot of time to the serve and return which is why those with a high match count become very skilled in the first 4 shots of each point. The vast majority of tennis players do not realise this.

A guideline for players looking to play at the professional level is to compete in more than 1000 matches by the age of 18. Those looking to play College tennis will need somewhere between 500-900 matches depending on what type and level of College the player is looking to attend.





PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Physical development is vital for a player to be able to perform at their best, as well as complete the training volume required to become world class. This is perhaps the most neglected area of a player’s development yet it can have the biggest consequences.

An elite player won’t get very far in the game if they don’t create a body that allows them to execute what they need to on court – day in day out, week in week out; and in most cases, do this for between 10-20 years or more. Tennis is a very repetitive sport with players repeating the same motions/actions up to thousands of times each week. This can place a lot of stress on the various parts of the body.

The Number 1 most important factor in physical development is injury prevention as one of the biggest setbacks to player improvement is repetitive or long term injury. Most of the time injuries can be prevented if identified early enough and a prehabilitation program is put in place and followed regularly.

Physical screening / Assessment

We strongly suggest that every elite tennis player receives a detailed physical screening / assessment.

An effective physical screening will analyse all joints and muscles in the body, its strengths, weaknesses, areas of inflexibility and identify any areas that will be susceptible to injury in the future.

After a physical screening, the athlete will typically be provided with a detailed report on each area of the body tested, as well as recommendations on what to work on to prevent injuries in the future. It’s vitally important these recommendations are followed as for most players, their bodies need to stay largely injury-free, for at least a decade or more.

Physical screenings are usually available in most cities, delivered by physiotherapists specialising in elite sports.

Enhancing athletic qualities

Once players have a prehabilitation program in place they should then focus on improving athletic qualities such as:

- Speed
- Strength
- Power
- Endurance

Programs designed to enhance athletic qualities are most effective when prescribed by exercise physiologists who understand the needs of tennis players.



“Tennis has a way of intensifying and bringing emotions to the surface and players need the understanding and coping strategies to deal with these situations.”



PSYCHOLOGY

There is a common saying that ‘sport is 90% mental’ and tennis would certainly have to be one of the most challenging sports when it comes to psychological pressure of competing in one-on-one situations. In team sports a player’s performance can often be hidden among their team mates, whilst in tennis (singles), all responsibility rests with the individual.

With players being 100% accountable for their results, it is not surprising to see the full array of emotions being displayed on court, from elation and ecstasy when winning, to throwing racquets and even crying on the court when things aren’t going their way. Tennis has a way of intensifying and bringing emotions to the surface and players need the understanding and coping strategies to deal with these situations.

A lot of parents can see the importance of the mental side of tennis yet the reality is very few spend any time or resources making sure their child is well equipped with the psychological foundations needed to be successful in elite tennis.

Some of the critical psychological skills your child needs to develop are:

- Improving their ability to concentrate over extended periods of time.
- Learning how to train and build tolerance for emotional pain and discomfort experienced during competition.
- Learning how to take effective action during the most critical points in a match when emotions are running high and being able to maintain high levels of play when facing adversity of any kind (internal or external).
- Knowing how to prime themselves and be mentally up for every match and training session.

A good sports psychologist with elite tennis experience can be very effective at developing a mental side of a player’s game which we would strongly recommend.

The good news is that when these mental skills are developed on the tennis court, they can be applied to any area of life and will often be the backbone of a successful career after tennis. Many CEOs and successful business people attribute a big part of their success to the lessons they learned when playing competitive sports in their childhood.





NUTRITION

With the amount of poor food choices readily available, it's no wonder the majority of tennis players struggle with making good nutrition choices. Poor nutrition choices often lead to lower energy, bad moods, getting sick more often and longer recovery times during a training or competition period.

Novak Djokovic attributes a lot of his success to working with a nutritionist in 2010 who identified a wheat and dairy intolerance was causing several mid-match breakdowns in his early career as a professional. After Novak changed his diet in 2010, he noticed an enormous difference to his energy and endurance level, and has since become one of the greatest players of all time with 14+ grand slams.

Parents play an essential role in their child's nutrition as they are often the ones shopping, cooking the meals, packing the lunches etc.

It takes time to develop good nutrition habits but when players adopt best practice nutrition it has the following benefits.

Tennis Benefits:

- Sustained energy means players can train harder for longer and improve at a faster rate.
- Performance in competition improves as players can compete at a high level over longer durations.
- Recovery time is faster after long training sessions and matches and players can back up performances the next day more easily.

Other Benefits:

- Better energy and increased durations of alertness for other activities such as school.
- Stronger immune system and get sick less often.
- Increase chances of having good mental health. Mental health issues among children are on the rise in Australia and other countries and research shows that good nutrition and mental health have strong links between each other.

Given the large effect nutrition has on performance we suggest booking in with a good sports nutritionist who can create a best practice nutrition plan for your child.



“It’s really important to have a support structure in place that can assist with guiding you through all of these areas.”



MENTORING AND GUIDANCE

Many parents without professional tennis backgrounds can struggle with understanding all the requirements to help their child become a successful player. It’s really important to have a support structure in place that can assist with guiding you through all of these areas. An effective high performance coach or academy program can play a huge role in helping you putting all of these critical elements together.

The private coach will play a big role in developing the player’s technical fundamentals at an early age and develop an appropriate game style that maximises the individual’s potential. An effective coach will be constantly prioritising the most important areas for the player to work on over each stage of their development.

Besides the technical and tactical components, parents often need to rely on a mentor who has the skills and experience to guide them through the many other facets of the game. This mentor is usually either the private coach or another person they trust who has a good understanding of the following areas:

- Developing a training plan that aligns with the player’s goals.
- Tournament scheduling and match play recommendations.
- Physical Development.
- Psychological Development.
- Nutrition.
- Education on pathways available through tennis, private school scholarships, U.S. College Tennis, Professional pathway etc.

It’s likely that there are some of the above components that your mentor is unfamiliar with but they should be able to provide referrals to professionals who can help you in these areas.





BEST PRACTICE TENNIS PARENTING

The reward of seeing your child play and compete can provide an enormous amount of personal satisfaction. Most would agree that being a tennis parent can at times be incredibly challenging and testing and it can be difficult to know whether you are doing the right thing. It's important to consider that parents are by far the Number 1 influence on how much success their child has in tennis and this is because of two main reasons:

1. Parents are usually the ultimate decision maker on the training and competition plan, the private coach, the physical and mental development, nutrition and all of the areas that determine how much success their child has in tennis.
2. Parents through their millions of communications and interactions with their children, shape what sort of person they become and whether they develop the personal characteristics that are desirable for elite sport.

We suggest that parents who are on this journey invest some of their time and energy into understanding what best practice tennis parenting looks like. Some of the key topics that are important for tennis parents to understand are:

- The requirements and commitments needed to become world class.
- The factors that influence your child's motivation.
- Best methods for communicating with your child in a way that boosts their self-confidence and self-esteem.
- How to encourage the development of strong personal qualities.
- Best ways to deal with difficult situations such as your child not trying, throwing tantrums on the court and how to communicate after they have a bad loss.

Some suggested reading on these topics are:

“The Talent Code: Greatness Isn't Born, It's Grown”. **Author: Daniel Coyle**

“Bounce: The Myth Of Talent And The Power Of Practice”. **Author: Mathew Syed**

“Coaching Mentally Tough Tennis: Lessons From The Trenches”. **Author: Anthony Ross**

“The Tennis Parents Bible: A Comprehensive Guide To Becoming A World Class Parent”. **Author: Frank Giampaolo**





UNDERSTANDING U.S. COLLEGE ELIGIBILITY

When elite tennis players graduate from high school they will have the opportunity to achieve College Tennis Scholarships in the United States and potentially other countries. Scholarships will depend on the student's ability to meet tennis and academic requirements.

The earlier students and parents prepare and understand the requirements for College the better the chances will be of achieving a successful and potential life changing outcome.

Full and partial athletic scholarships are offered at over 1,000 colleges in the United States with some these being of the most prestigious in the world. This can be worth up to \$400,000.00 (USD) over a 4 year period and can set students up for life.

A typical scholarship will cover part or all of tutoring and academic support, racquets, clothes sponsorship, travel around the USA, food and accommodation off campus, massage and physiotherapy along with a percentage of tuition, books, on campus housing and food.

U.S. College Tennis is also the most common pathway for players who are looking to pursue professional tennis. Many of the world's best 18-22 year olds spend these 4 valuable years developing their tennis as a stepping stone onto the professional circuit.

There are 2 main criteria that tennis players will need to achieve to be eligible:

1. Tennis Results

The first criteria is the player's track record of strong tennis results. U.S. Colleges do this by analysing a player's Universal Tennis Rating (UTR) as their number 1 tool to recruit players into their teams. The UTR ranges for male players to achieve scholarships across various divisions are 9.5 to 13.5+ whilst female players will need to be in the range of 6.5 to 10.5+. The higher a player's UTR, the more College scholarship opportunities will be available to them. Importantly there are 6 divisions of competition and all of them have different requirements in order to attain suitable scholarship.

2. Academic Results

Academic requirements are the other main criteria to be eligible for College. Colleges use 3 methods to assess whether a player's academics are eligible for their college. They are:

- Grade point averages (GPA) from year 11 onwards.
- Subject selection (critical for year 9 onwards).
- SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) exam score which is an English and Maths multiple choice entrance exam that, best taken in Year 11 initially. Note: this exam can be taken multiple times with your best score counting.

The academic requirements of U.S. Colleges are very achievable for most students although those who don't apply themselves or who make the wrong choices with their subject selection can make themselves ineligible for certain divisions of college in the US.



SUMMARY

At Voyager Tennis Academy, we believe in creating a holistic plan that truly maximises a player's potential. The players who implement all areas in this checklist usually greatly out-perform their peer group and achieve more success on and off the court.

If you'd like more detail about any of the areas in this checklist or would like a personalised plan, contact us to book in for a 1 hour individualised strategy session. In this session we will discuss areas such as:

- Recommended training hours (in alignment with your tennis goals).
- Recommended match-play quantity (in alignment with your tennis goals).
- Sports Psychology.
- Physical Development.
- Nutrition for athletes.
- Technical Development.
- Tactical Development.
- Maintaining your child's motivation. Goal setting and measuring progress.
- Best practice tennis parenting.

Read more about our elite tennis programs which cover all of these components by visiting our website www.voyagertennis.com.

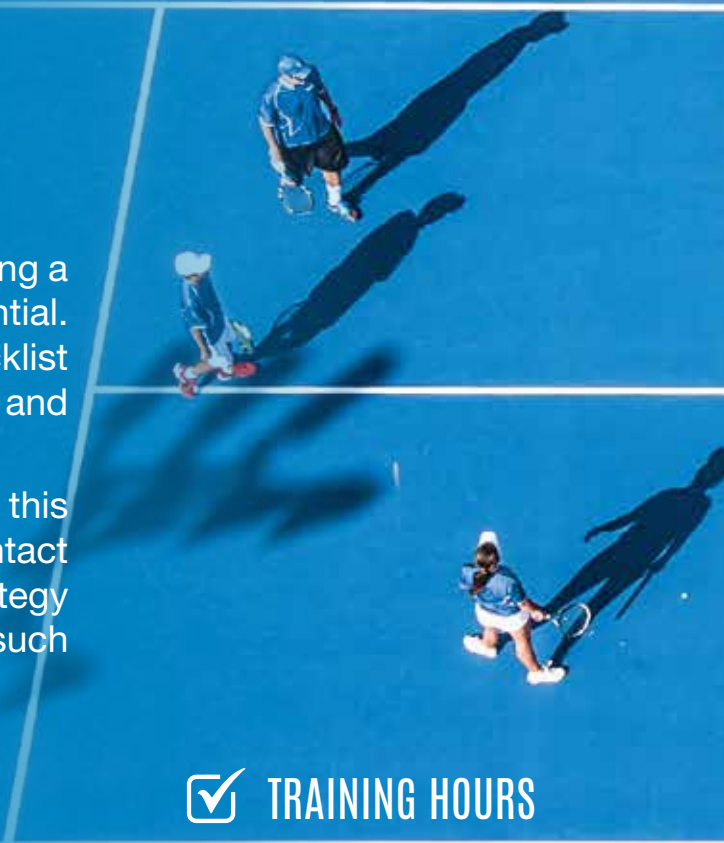
Individualised strategy session:

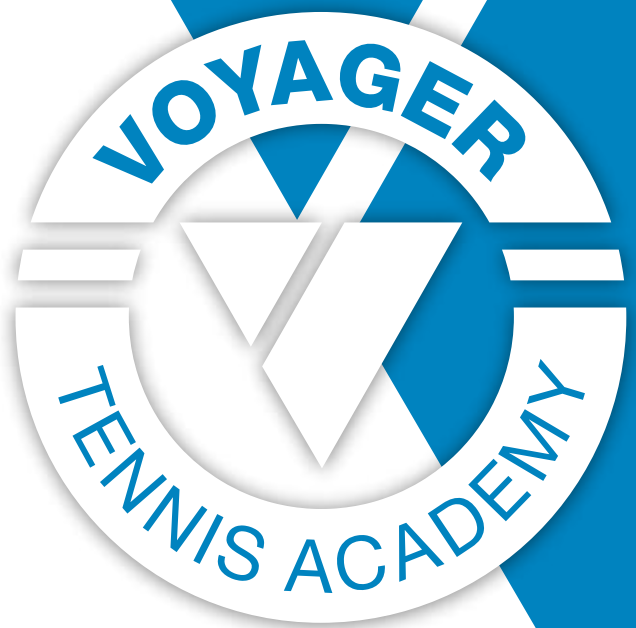
- Make a booking: Email info@voyagertennis.com with subject line 'Strategy session' to arrange a suitable time.
- Fee: \$95 inc. GST for 1 hour.
- Skype sessions available for those who do not live in Sydney

Voyager elite programs:

- Visit our website to read more about our Performance squads or Full-time tennis and academic program
- Visit www.voyagertennis.com
- Enquire: info@voyagertennis.com

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