An Investigative Study of Greek Tennis Coaches Training Methods and Their Education

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ABSTRACT

The basic role of the tennis coach is to determine the training methods that will contribute more efficiently to the improvement of the athletes' performance. The purpose of the present study is to determine the technique training methods, which the Greek Tennis Coaches apply. A relevant questionnaire was thus handed out to 90 Greek Coaches. It was then analyzed by use of factorial and descriptive methods. The results are that Greek coaches, as far as methodology is concerned, are either influenced by one of the internationally prevailing schools or by the education provided by the Greek Government provides. As for the training methodology, it has been proved that there is no clear or, at least, dominating opinion on the methodology of training. On the contrary, there are many intrinsic differences and errors in the first two groups, whereas the third one does not practice the modern methods. The above evidence the lack of a common educational practice to be implemented and developed in the long term. Also, there is no relation between training methodology and technique.

Keywords: Technique training, methodology, softballs, special rackets and balls, basic technique, instant tennis.

INTRODUCTION

One aim of a tennis coach is to improve player performance, and coaches will have a number of coaching methods and strategies they can employ to enhance this process. In addition, the knowledge base that underpins the coaching process is constantly changing due to research in coaching methodology and individual experiences (Fairweather, 1999).

The role of the tennis coach is to organize, support, control, motivate, co-operate, estimate the cost, programme, select, train, do public relations and lead (Grespo, 1997). Through control, the coach traces the abilities and the weaknesses of the team, anticipates problems, readjusts schedules and programmes and takes measures, when necessary. In the framework of a proper organisation and administration, control is necessary because it helps at the materialisation of the targets (Profetis, 1993). The profession of the coach includes individual and team guidance of individuals who have a different past, talent, experiences and interests. (Peter & Austin, 1985). The coach must not only be aware of the sport technique and tactic but also, of how to teach this to the athletes. The coach must not only master the psychological capabilities which are necessary to discern the athlete but also, the capabilities of guidance and communication (Martens, 1987). The coach must support the athlete whenever s/he does something right. The coach must correct any mistakes and weaknesses, not in a negative way but by providing the proper information about the right technique performance (Soulardros, 1992). Moreover, players prefer their coach to be calm and encourage them (Argiriadou, Mavrovouniotis, Pelekoudas, Kougjoumtzidis, & Sofiadis, 1998). The coach-player relation is a social "contact". The coaches represent the adult standard for the players. The coach leading capability plays an important role in increasing the players’ motivation levels. As much the athlete performance as his/her satisfaction may be achieved or disappear under the influence of the coach guidance (Grespo, 1997). Very often, the athlete faces technique problems (low performance, injuries) or personal problems (behaviour, psychology). The coach, with the quality of the instructor and advisor, must trace the problem and help the athlete by advising him/her.

The coach must determine a) the work to be done (the goals of the coming competition period), b) what has to be done, which specific actions are to be taken and who will assume them. Here, the coach proceeds to a "division of labour among the assistants, the managers, the agents, the rest of the staff (Laios, 1994). By the operation of control, the coach aims at: a) the determination of the performance standards. The athletes and the staff must know exactly what their target is. The coach must determine the performance objectives and the success criteria. The standards of the expected performance must be realistic. They must not be very high, as the athletes will ignore them, knowing they cannot achieve them, nor very low, as their interest and consequently their performance could be reduced, b) the comparison between the real performance and the programmed one (Profetis, 1993). Being aware of the team’s needs, the coach tries to motivate the athletes and the staff. He turns the motivations to advantage in order to
achieve the goals (Soulandros, 1992). Time is the only thing we have in common with our rivals. When talent is equal, making the best possible use of time will help the best-prepared team win (Brown, 1983). Efficient communication of technical knowledge to the athletes is one of the responsibilities of the tennis coach.

Especially in tennis, the technique methodology of the basic strokes (basic strokes, forehand, backhand, volley, store and overhead) is a very important activity. The training methodology as well (instant tennis, special rackets and balls), has a significant impact on the individual development and the future progress of tennis players. The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) also suggests that for very young players (4-8 years old) the ball could be larger in order to make the game slower (LTA, 2005). While mini tennis focuses on children the LTA suggest that beginners of all ages would benefit from playing the game with the slow moving balls, making skill learning easier. As regards the technique methodology, the main characteristic of the Spanish school (Methodo Maestria) is the use of the Western grip on the totality of the basic strokes. On the contrary, in the Swedish school (Swedish way), and the German school (Tennis Lehrplan) the eastern grip dominates as typical of basic strokes. As for the training methodology, the use of auxiliary means (special rackets, balls) is met in all three schools (Methodo maestria, Swedish Way, German school). Another common trait of the above schools is the implementation of the instant tennis method which aims at the teaching of the basic strokes in a brief period of time (Van der Meer, 1995). Challenges to the traditional style of coaching have led to the development of the game-based approach to coaching (Thorpe & Bunker, 1982). The success of this new method resulting in Tennis Coaches Australia (TCA) adopting the game-based approach to coaching as their preferred model (TCA, 2002). The use of non–traditional methods have also been investigated in younger players, a here a series of pre–tennis activities using mini tennis equipment led to improvements in fundamental motor skill acquisition in 5 year olds. This suggests that such improvements would ease the transition to learning specialist tennis skills (Quezada, Riquelme, Rodriguez, & Godoy, 2001).

Method

Participants

The sample comprised 90 coaches aged from 18 to 52 years. The average age of the sample was 30 years old. 63.4 % were men and 36.6 % women. 87.4 % were former athletes. In terms of profession, 8.2% were full-time coaches with services slip. The majority (91.8%) was part-timers, without contract and insurance. In terms of education, 18.0 % of the coaches were holders of diplomas from the General Secretariat for Sports. The level of education of the sample had the following characteristics: 2.2 % Primary School, 1.1 % 3-Seat Gymnasium, 4.5 % General Education High School, 1.1 % Technical Trade School, 2.2 % lower school CHTPE- TEI (Centres of Higher Technical Professional Education - Technical Institutes of Education), 75.3 % Higher Education Degree DFESS (Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences), 7.9 % have a postgraduate degree, 4.5 % a master's degree, 1.1 % a Ph.D.

Procedure

The method used to determine the characteristics and the training methods of the Greek Tennis coach was based on the use of a questionnaire. In the research, 90 coaches from all parts of Greece completed the questionnaire. The whole range of Greek tennis coaching was represented, with participants coming from every category. Part-time and full time coaches, empirical coaches and gymnasts. The questionnaire records the opinions of the coaches in relation to the technique they teach and the training methodology they follow. Technique training referred to the basic strokes forehand, backhand, volley, serve and overhead. Training methodology referred to instant tennis, to the use of special rackets and balls during training and to the required time for the teaching of the basic technique.

Results

Methodology of Technique Teaching

In order to find out whether the Greek coaches practice a common methodology in teaching the basic
strokes (forehand, backhand, volley, serve, and overhead), a homogeneity analysis (correspondence) was carried out. The first three axes of this analysis include 60.97% of the total variance. In the first axis we have the differentiation between the variables evidence the use of the Eastern Grip in Volley, Serve and Overhead strokes, and the variables evidencing that the Continental Grip is used in Volley, Serve and Overhead strokes. In the second axis, we have an opposition of Eastern and Western mainly with regard to the Overhead, Serve and Backhand variables, and more generally with the other variables. In the third axis, the opposition of Western and Continental in Forehand and Backhand variables is noticed.

In order to find out whether there are different methods of technique teaching among the trainers, we proceeded to a cluster analysis. Three groups occurred: The first category consisting of 75 persons. It seems that it uses the Continental grip in Overhead, Volley and Serve strokes and not the Eastern or Western Grip for the respective Overhead, Serve and Volley strokes. The second category, consisting of 10 persons seems to use the Western Grip for Serve and Overhead strokes and not the Continental Grip in the respective ones or the Eastern Grip in the Backhand. The third category, consisting of 5 persons, uses the Eastern and not at all the Continental grip for Serve, Overhead and Volley strokes.

The results of the descriptive analysis for the whole sample are illustrated in Diagrams 1 and 2.

Diagram 1

Relative frequency of the grip used by coaches for forehand strokes.

Notes: 1. 10 % use the Continental grip.

2. 72.2 % use the Eastern grip.

3. 17.8 % use the Western grip.

Diagram 2

Relative frequency of the grip used by coaches for Backhand strokes.
Notes: 1. 20.2% use the Continental grip.

2. 59.6% use the Eastern grip.

3. 20.2% use the Western grip.

Training Methodology

*Instant Tennis, special rackets and balls.* In order to establish whether Greek tennis coaches adopt a clear and common direction in terms of training method (instant tennis, use of special rackets and balls at an initial teaching level), we used a respective questionnaire for the factorial analysis and the clustering. In the homogeneity analysis (correspondence), we note the differentiation of variable from the rest, and in the second axis, each two correlated groups of variables are formed and opposed to each other. On one hand, the variables are stating the use of special rackets and balls and on the other hand, the ones stating the use of instant tennis with limited in time teaching of basics.

Carrying out the grouping of the correspondences results, we have the following Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Results of the factorial analysis of correspondences of the "Basic strokes technique methodology" data table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st factor</th>
<th>2nd factor</th>
<th>3rd factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which of the following grips do you use more often</td>
<td>Co-ordinates</td>
<td>Absolute participation of axis</td>
<td>Cosinus squared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continental</td>
<td>-01</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>-1.01</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Results of the factorial analysis of correspondences of the "Backhand Tech." data table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st factor</th>
<th>2nd factor</th>
<th>3rd factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continental</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>-64</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Results of the grouping of the data table of the third unit "training methodology"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>During learning stages</th>
<th>Evaluation Test</th>
<th>Coaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class 1</td>
<td>Use special balls (Tech 7)</td>
<td>-3.89</td>
<td>30 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special rackets (Tech 6)</td>
<td>-3.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How much time do the athletes need (Tech 5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instant tennis-It is efficient (Tech 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 2</td>
<td>Instant tennis-It is efficient (Tech 5.04)</td>
<td></td>
<td>27 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How much time do the athletes need (Tech 5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use special rackets during initial 4 earning stages (Tech 6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class 3</td>
<td>Use special rackets during initial 7.48 earning stages (Tech 6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>33 persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use special balls during initial 5.72 learning stages (Tech 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One out of the three coaches groups comprising 33 persons does not use special rackets and balls during the initial learning stages. The second group of 27 persons uses instant tennis and their players need a lot of time before they start playing at Half Court. This group of coaches does not seem to use special rackets and balls during the initial levels of tennis technique learning. Finally, they only get their players to play after a while. Finally, the third group of coaches comprising 30 persons seems to use special rackets and
Discussion

Considering the results of the research, it is clear that coaches do not have a common methodology in terms of technique teaching and a clear direction in terms of training method. Three classes (groups) of coaches derived from the grouping analysis.

The first class of coaches, including 75 persons, use the continental grip in teaching the overhead, volley and serve technique. This class of coaches does not use the eastern nor the western grip for the respective strokes. Three more groups of coaches derive from the above class. The first group of 43 coaches who use the Eastern Grip for the Forehand and Backhand Basic Strokes. This category of coaches is influenced by the Swedish School, which teaches the Eastern Grip (Swedish Way, 1999). Swedish tennis dominated in the '80s (Bjorn Borg) at the time where tennis started developing in Greece. The second group (27 coaches) is influenced by the Spanish school which uses the Western Grip for the Forehand and Backhand Basic Strokes (Arranz, Anrade, & Grespo, 1993). The third group (5 coaches) includes in the first class, uses the Continental Grip for the Forehand. These coaches are influenced by the old technique teaching method and frequently use the same grip (Continental) for all the Basic Strokes. (Ruth & Le Bar, 1982). The second class of coaches comprises 10 persons using the Western Grip for Serve and Overhead. The Spanish school (Methodo Maestria) influences this class, and, for Serve and Overhead, they use the same grip as for the Forehand and Backhand Basic Strokes (Arranz, Anrade, & Grespo, 1993). The third class which is the smallest one (5 persons), uses the Eastern Grip for the Serve, Overhead and Volley Strokes, as well as for the Forehand and Backhand Basic Strokes.

Apart from the trends related to technique methodology, three coaches groups can also be observed in terms of training methodology. The first group (33 persons) uses the traditional training method during the first technique teaching stages (no special rackets, balls or variety). This group of coaches uses almost the same training methods for young and grown-ups, ignores the concept of individual differences and kinetic capabilities observed in young and grown-ups (Schmidt, 1991). Moreover, apart from the neuromuscular differences among the young and the grown-ups, insufficient care development on the part of the young players, renders short training necessary (30-40 min) (Papachristou, 1987). The second group (27 persons) does not use auxiliary means (special rackets and balls) but considers instant tennis as an efficient method. This group believes that 5 and 6-year-old children must not enter the court quickly and, in general, they believe that quite a period of time is required for technique teaching training. One should add at this point that instant tennis is internationally considered as a quick method of technique learning, allowing the athletes to enter the court soon (Van der Meer, 1995). The third group of coaches (30) does not practice a varied training, does not use auxiliary means (special rackets and balls) and does not attempt at getting the athletes to-enter the small court soon. This group does not believe that instant tennis (learning technique) is an efficient teaching method of the basic technique during the initial stage. This category's coaches adopt the philosophy of complete tennis (Van der Meer, 1982) and pay great attention to the technique strengthening.

The results are that Greek coaches, as far as methodology is concerned, are either influenced by one of the internationally prevailing schools or by the education provided by the Greek Government provides. As for the training methodology, it has been proved that there is no clear or, at least, dominating opinion on the methodology of training. On the contrary, there are many, intrinsic differences and errors in the first two groups, whereas the third one does not practice the modern methods. The above evidence the lack of a common educational practice to be implemented and developed in the long term. Also, there is no relation between training methodology and technique.
Finally, no common educational model in Greece exists in terms of basic stroke technique. As for the training methodology there is no common methodology, a fact that creates contradictions and errors. In conclusion, a common educational practice must be applied on training issues, this practice having to follow the international educational tendency.

References


