

Report on the Outcome of the High Performance Consultation Process

The development of the performance strategy for British Tennis has been the focus of the Interim Performance Director over the last few months. Following a presentation to the LTA Board in February 2016 approval was given for a 3-month stakeholder consultation process comprising of 13 interactive workshops, delivered in locations across all regions, to which over 500 former players, coaches, parents, commentators, county and regional leaders, and facilities operators were invited. Anonymous electronic polling was used to gauge opinion on 11 draft “guiding principles” and to trigger open discussion of the merits and implications of the proposals outlined.

In total 219 people attended the workshops. The results of the polling, together with the large volume of individual observations and comments captured during the workshops were analysed, and adjustments and refinements made to the strategic framework where there was clear evidence of the need to do so. The resulting revised guiding principles, together with a high level implementation plan based on them was presented to the LTA Board in June, which agreed to the formal sign-off of the principles.

This report presents the now confirmed LTA Performance Principles, together with the polling data from the consultation workshops, and commentary on their implications.

The LTA would like to thank all of the people who participated in the workshops. The quality of the debate was very high and the insights shared and ideas offered were of great value. As a result, we are now confident that our direction of travel has the support of a wide range of stakeholders. The conclusion of this process, together with the confirmation of our new Performance Director means we can now move to developing our operational plans for 2017 and beyond, and will strive to ensure we keep you updated of these.

Peter Keen
Interim Performance Director
July 2016

The workshops commenced with a debate about the primary reason why the LTA should run programmes and make investments in activities designed to help British players become competitive on the world stage. Five options were presented, and the poll results were:

Primary reason for investment	Poll result
Drive participation and inspire future champions through visible GB success	75%
Because it's there: the indefinable appeal of an aspiration goal	12%
Promotion of National Identity	10%
Our Public service or duty – it's what want the tennis community expect	3%
Economic return – an income stream for the sport	0%

The overwhelming view supports the notion that seeing success, and having the opportunity to pursue it is seen as a driver of engagement, although some participants questioned the strength of evidence to support this assertion.

Principle 1: *We invest in Performance because the inspiration of visible British success can drive the aspiration to participate and compete.*

- By helping British players to develop to the level where they are competitive on the global stage we can generate high levels of media and public interest in our sport
- In order to capitalise on the opportunities created by visible success, we need to be ready and prepared to mobilise new opportunities and capacity capable of capturing and retaining new participants

Poll Options	Poll result	Summary
1. Strongly supportive	47%	88% supported
2. Broadly supportive	41%	
3. Undecided/neutral	6%	
4. Significant reservations	6%	6% opposed
5. Strongly opposed	0%	

Logically it follows that this was supported, given that most stakeholders believe this is the reason why the LTA should invest in performance. The majority of insights as to why delegates polled 3 or 4 related to skepticism that either the mechanism works in principle, that inspiration needs to come from British success (for example, Federer is inspiring), or that the LTA will be able to exploit success.

Implications:

- This generates a clear mandate to ensure players in receipt of LTA performance support and their supporters understand and accept the need to both acknowledge the reason behind the investment they receive, and actively promote this through values and behaviors.
- In order to maximize the value of high achieving British players supported by the LTA we need to make their journeys and stories much more visible.

Principle 2: We see the performance landscape as two distinct, but interdependent domains: the domestic pathway from local to national prominence, and Pro Tour Tennis

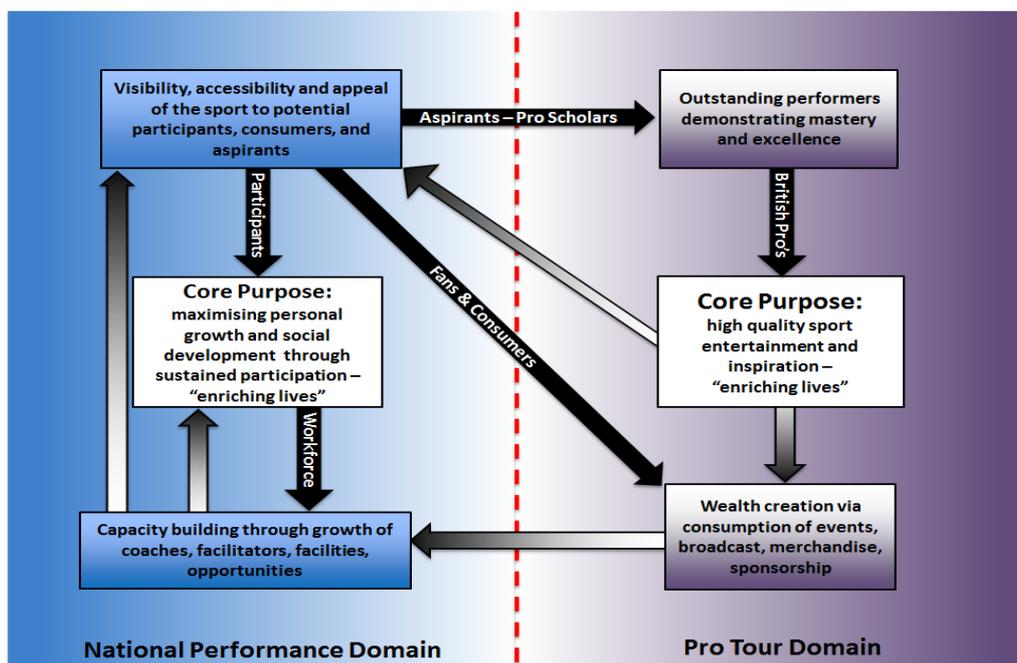
- The cultural and lifestyle differences between the two are now significant - managing player and coach transition between the first and the second is the key to developing more players who succeed on the Tour
- The greatest difference lies in the psychological traits and skills required to succeed as a tennis pro, and this must be reflected in our selection and support processes

Poll Options	Poll result	Summary
1. Strongly supportive	66%	92% supported
2. Broadly supportive	26%	
3. Undecided/neutral	5%	
4. Significant reservations	2%	3% opposed
5. Strongly opposed	1%	

The exploration of this principle generated by far the strongest reactions in the workshops. Past LTA policies and actions have been perceived as having shaped the domestic performance landscape, especially junior developmental tennis, primarily to serve the needs of producing future champions, rather than the health and growth of mainstream competitive tennis.

The proposed solutions explored in this principle – to be much more overt about the existence of the two worlds, where they connect and interact, and to reflect this in our structures and activities – were warmly received. Criticisms were mostly about the lack of detail behind the changes envisaged.

Recognizing that the evolution of our sport has resulted in this clear divide opens up the opportunity for greater clarity in our strategic thinking. When viewed in this way one can see that although the primary purpose of the two domains are clearly different, there are equally clear interdependencies that need to be acknowledged. It could also be argued that they share a common outcome – enriching lives. The following diagram attempts to summarise this perspective:



Implications:

- We need a sustained communication and education programme in which we are much more overt about the dividing line between the two domains. To help achieve this we need to adopt new terms to describe and explain the sections of the performance landscape, and how our policies, programmes and activities relate to them.
- Up to Pro Scholarship level the player development pathways we invest in must be as inclusive as possible – the message has to be minimise rejection and maximise retention of players at all levels of competition.

Principle 3: *Our role in Pro Tennis is to facilitate and support the growth and success of players and coaches we believe have the greatest aptitude for success on the Tour*

- Pro Tennis is highly individual and entrepreneurial – top players and coaches operate independently of NGB Programmes
- We must focus on facilitating the development of both players and coaches with the greatest aptitude for success in Pro Tennis
- LTA National Coaching staff should not operate as personal coaches to players

Poll Options	Poll result	Summary
1. Strongly supportive	66%	93% supported
2. Broadly supportive	27%	
3. Undecided/neutral	5%	
4. Significant reservations	2%	2% opposed
5. Strongly opposed	0%	

Implications:

- This principle acknowledges the need for us to be selective in where we direct our resources when supporting players and their coaches in the transition into Pro tennis in a way which is honest about the highly competitive nature of international tennis and the very limited opportunities to reach a stable level of visible successes on the tours. This is illustrated best by the very small number of new entrants into the top 100 rankings each year. Placing, on average, just one player of each gender into the top one hundred every year would rank us among the top five nations.
- Support throughout the consultation was near universal for the notion that LTA coaching staff must not operate as personal coaches to players. Although the Performance Team have already committed publically to work in this way, we will have to work hard and remain thoroughly consistent in our actions if this is to be understood and accepted by stakeholders.

Principle 4: *The cornerstone of our approach to developing national performance standards is a network of regional training opportunities supporting aspiring players and coaches*

- We have to drive down financial and time costs by developing excellence on a regional basis
- Regional programmes need appropriate autonomy and must drive collaboration at county level
- LTA staff should coordinate regional training, facilitate coach development and develop competition opportunities

Poll Options	Poll result	Summary
1. Strongly supportive	42%	79% supported
2. Broadly supportive	37%	
3. Undecided/neutral	15%	
4. Significant reservations	6%	6% opposed
5. Strongly opposed	0%	

This was the most contentious of all the proposed principles. Although the debates resulted in a strong overall positive rating for the concept of regular regional training, and the need for a small number of centres where a culture of excellence is a reality, the history of different initiatives in this space has left high levels of skepticism in the minds of many.

The conclusion drawn here was that more detailed thinking is required here and the progressive re-wording of this principle that emerged through the consultation exercise given above is positioned as the starting point for this.

Principle 5: *The role of the National Tennis Centre, Roehampton is as a World-Class service centre for Pro Pathway Players and their Coaches, and the source of expert support for the regional performance programmes*

- We will build a team of world-class coaches and support staff capable of adding value to programmes of players and coaches operating at the very highest level
- The NTC will continue to host national camps and specialist training activities for players and their coaches

Poll Options	Poll result	Summary
1. Strongly supportive	47%	88% supported
2. Broadly supportive	41%	
3. Undecided/neutral	9%	
4. Significant reservations	3%	3% opposed
5. Strongly opposed	0%	

Implications:

- It was clear that whilst there is widespread acceptance that the NTC has a key role to play in the future, work needs to be done to build its reputation as an extraordinary environment in which to learn and develop as a player or a coach aspiring to succeed on the world stage. The

challenge is to develop this reputation, but at the same time not foster a perception of it as exclusive and inaccessible.

- Development of medical and scientific support services, knowledge and education should be a key focus for the NTC going forward. It makes sense to ‘centralise’ our efforts in this area as this ensures the critical mass of practitioners with different skills working together to deliver an interdisciplinary approach.
- A delicate balance will have to be struck between developing the expert team of coaches and support staff at the NTC, and ensuring that they spend enough time at events and regional training locations to comply with Principles 3 and 4.

Principle 6: LTA performance support resources are finite and access to them is a privilege, not a right

- We wish to see healthy competition for the support available at all levels of development
- We will use selection processes at all stages of player and coach development that consider both current performance **and** future potential
- We will strive to use a balance of objective measures and expert judgement in all selection decisions
- We will be open and transparent about processes and the levels of support offered to players and coaches

Poll Options	Poll result	Summary
1. Strongly supportive	85%	98% supported
2. Broadly supportive	13%	
3. Undecided/neutral	2%	
4. Significant reservations	0%	0% opposed
5. Strongly opposed	0%	

As the poll results indicate, there was near unanimous support for the sentiments expressed through this principle, and an acknowledgement that recent culture within the sport has not reflected this.

Implications:

- This principle provides the foundation for the cultural change that needs to be achieved if we are to see more impact from the investment we make in the performance landscape. At the core of our messaging on the purpose of providing grants and scholarships is that these are intended to help progression and development, not to reward prior performance. This requires us to use judgement on how likely an individual is to progress, something that requires thorough processes that are trusted and respected by those affected by them. The use of clear, open and transparent processes and expert panels will be the key to achieving this.

Principle 7: Financial assistance to developing players and coaches will be in the form of grants aimed at providing approximately 50% of the essential costs of full commitment

- Leading players and coaches operate in a highly professional environment which offers significant financial rewards
- We recognise that sustained financial support is necessary to reach a ranking/standard resulting in financial independence
- Where individuals seek a level of support greater than 50% they must be able to demonstrate both genuine performance need and a lack of means
- Our aim is to support players until they achieve sufficient income from prize money to cover all essential costs

Poll Options	Poll result	Summary
1. Strongly supportive	64%	94% supported
2. Broadly supportive	30%	
3. Undecided/neutral	5%	
4. Significant reservations	1%	1% opposed
5. Strongly opposed	0%	

The discussion of this principle revealed not only the strength of recognition that significant financial support is required to succeed in pro tennis, but that a much more “facts and figures” based approach to the topic is required. Despite the near obsession with this subject in tennis and the financial speculation this results in, there is a remarkable lack of facts, norms or rules to inform discussion or set expectations.

Implications:

- We will need to base our resourcing of player development on accurate assessments of the economics of tennis – what it cost to play and develop, as well as the rewards that may be reaped. However, although player income through prize money is completely visible, other income streams such as sponsorship and appearance fees are not, and cannot therefore be factored into any generic model.
- The common sense view that some form of means testing should be applied to ensure that financial support is appropriately targeted and reflects need presents a significant administrative challenge for an NGB. Devolving this responsibility to an arms-length body may prove to an effective solution.

Principle 8: It can take 10 years for an emerging player or coach to achieve mastery, so we too must have the courage to play the long-game in our strategy

- Cultural stability will be best achieved by a sustained period of only small incremental changes, coupled with clear, consistent communication
- The influence of an **Independent Expert Advisory Group** on policy changes should ensure change is carefully considered and wisely executed

Poll Options	Poll result	Summary
1. Strongly supportive	82%	96% supported
2. Broadly supportive	14%	
3. Undecided/neutral	2%	
4. Significant reservations	1%	2% opposed
5. Strongly opposed	1%	

Anecdotal feedback supported the poll results – there is fatigue among stakeholders from what they have perceived as the rate and degree of policy change over the last 15-20 years.

Implication:

- In a sport as complex as tennis it is difficult for a single leader to have sole responsibility for ongoing evolution of the strategy, so the formation of an independent expert advisory group to provide wisdom, perspective and a check and challenge to the leadership is strongly advocated.

Principle 9: We believe player development is enhanced by on-going education and will encourage those aspiring to play professionally to maintain some form of scholarly activity

- Evidence from the Men’s Tour shows the College pathway is compatible with the attainment of a top 100 ranking
- The current Women’s top 10 average 28 years of age. There may be a trend emerging away from early maturation
- A slower speed programme for Pro Scholars who wish to continue in 16+ formal education must be offered

Poll Options	Poll result	Summary
1. Strongly supportive	76%	94% supported
2. Broadly supportive	18%	
3. Undecided/neutral	4%	
4. Significant reservations	2%	2% opposed
5. Strongly opposed	0%	

Historical statistical evidence that the most successful (top 10) players hit all developmental benchmarks younger than their less successful peers presents a growing dilemma for parents and coaches. Early specialization and commitment is perceived be a requirement of ultimate success, but potentially at the expense of a promising young players academic and general development. Furthermore, insufficient attention is paid to attrition rates, even at high levels of intermediate accomplishment. The 2014 ITF report cited earlier found that only 17% of top 100 raked ITF juniors (boys and girls) from 2008 made it into the top 100 senior ranks, taking on average 3.7 years to do so.

In contrast, current legislation not only requires compulsory full-time education until 16 years of age (year 11) but also, from 2015, at least part-time until 18. While the legal definition of education appears vague the spirit is not – there is an expectation that up until 16 children must be in “full-time” education, whether in a home, State or independent setting.

Implications:

- We have to have a clear, explicit position on this topic, both philosophically, and in our policies and actions. At the moment the cultural tide is against waiting for later development in either sport or academic achievement, but this needs to be set against the increasing age of top ranked players, longer careers, and of course the fact that only a very small percentage of aspiring players will secure a viable career as a Tour Pro. Setting clear boundaries, such as pro scholarships limited to over 16's, and incentivising ongoing study by, for example, match-funding distance learning study for supported players are recommended.

Principle 10: *Optimising parent engagement and support will be critical to the success of our Performance Strategy*

- We need to develop a range of methods for engaging, educating and supporting parents with children on the tennis performance pathway

Poll Options	Poll result	Summary
1. Strongly supportive	90%	98% supported
2. Broadly supportive	8%	
3. Undecided/neutral	2%	
4. Significant reservations	0%	0% opposed
5. Strongly opposed	0%	

Implications:

- It is clear that without a concerted effort to build better partnerships with parents and developing their knowledge of performance tennis in parallel with their children we cannot succeed in our ambition to be a world leading tennis nation.
- A particular area of initial focus should be better sharing of information about the challenging nature of the career pathways in Pro Tennis, contrasted with the many alternative positive outcomes of a deep commitment to performance development.

Guiding Principle 11:

We value Doubles, as both a developmental process and an opportunity for global success for British players

- Davis and Fed Cup progression and success is dependent on doubles prowess
- Several Olympic medals are available
- Doubles is deeply engrained in the culture of British Tennis and presents an opportunity to build a winning culture faster

Poll Options	Poll result	Summary
1. Strongly supportive	67%	91% supported
2. Broadly supportive	24%	
3. Undecided/neutral	7%	
4. Significant reservations	2%	2% opposed
5. Strongly opposed	0%	

Implications:

- There is clearly a desire to see performance support provided to players capable of playing at the highest level of doubles. Most attendees were comfortable with the proposal that whilst the Pro scholarship model should focus only on our best singles prospects, a support mechanism should exist for senior players with sufficient tour experience who wish to specialize in doubles and are capable of attaining at least a top 50 ranking.