

<b>Institution: Loughborough University</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: C-24 Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism</b>		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Improved duties of care, practical education and enriched competition experiences for parents and children in national and international tennis		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2006-2019</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Chris Harwood, PhD	Professor of Sport Psychology	1998-current
Chris Spray, PhD	Reader in Sport and Exercise Psychology	1999- current
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-present</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N.</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>The behaviour of the parents of young tennis players is crucial to the quality of experience and retention of players, other parents, and officials in grassroots tennis. Research at Loughborough University into understanding and improving parental involvement has led to the following impacts. First, it has enabled national and international tennis organisations to improve their duties of care by providing the mechanisms for the development and implementation of the British Lawn Tennis Association's (LTA) and the International Tennis Federation's (ITF) global parent education programmes. Second, by mobilising significant financial and operational investments into practical, in-person initiatives and multi-lingual e-learning modules, these programmes have engaged tennis parents across 137 countries, leading to improved parental confidence, behaviour, and parent-child experiences of competition.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Understanding parental behaviour in youth tennis and how parents could be best supported represents over a decade of research conducted at Loughborough University and led by Professor Chris Harwood between 2006 and 2019. His initial research focused on investigations into the stressors experienced by British tennis parents [R1, R2]. These studies were triggered by the manslaughter conviction of Christophe Fauvau, the French Tennis father jailed for killing his son's opponent via applying incapacitating drugs to his drinks bottle prior to competition.</p> <p>Acknowledging the tragedy of this case, but in contrast to the generic, negative media portrayal of tennis parents, this research sought to understand parents' experiences in British tennis. Findings from these two studies illustrated a range of competition, organisational, and developmental stressors that affected their behaviour and involvement. Parents noted their struggles with the tennis system, other parents, coaches, and officials as well as the strain of watching their child compete that fuelled emotions such as anxiety and anger. These findings offered significant implications in terms of maintaining parents' attraction to the game and keeping families involved in tennis as a healthy, lifelong activity.</p> <p>Subsequently, between 2012-2016, follow-up research explored parents' education and support needs [R3] with reference to optimising their involvement and experiences within the sport. This research, supported by a LU funded PhD studentship, was conducted in three UK regional tennis centres and led to a grounded theory of parent education and support needs specific to parents within the mini-tennis stage through to parents of mid-adolescent players [R3]. In 2015, an understanding of tennis parents' experiences [i.e., from R1, R2] was extended by investigating the entire stress process (i.e., stressors, emotions, and coping strategies) experienced by a sample of 135 parents [R6]. Findings illustrated how parents experienced tennis situations as both threatening, harmful and challenging, and demonstrated the range of coping techniques (e.g., communication; withdrawal; re-appraisal) that parents attempted to employ to manage emotions such as anxiety, anger and dejection.</p>		

The conceptual insights from **R3**, supplemented by findings from **R1**, **R2** and **R6**, were translated into educational content. Subsequently, through an action research methodology, a three-month, multi-workshop intervention study (the Loughborough Tennis Parent Education Programme-LTPEP) was conducted with 22 tennis parents of young players in three LTA tennis centres [**R4**]. Improvements were reported in parents' knowledge about how to optimally support their child in tennis, their confidence as parents in executing appropriate support roles, the goals they held for their child and their own enjoyment of the tennis experience. The research team subsequently tailored the educational material into a digital research study [**R5**] where parents could access the series of LTPEP modules online. Parents from 13 separate families completed this pre-post group-based mixed-methods intervention with quantitative and qualitative results reinforcing how the course content and process had positively influenced their levels of knowledge, confidence in parental support roles, attitude to success, and emotional experiences of the game.

#### References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1** Harwood, C.G., & Knight, C.J. (2009). Understanding parental stressors in tennis: An investigation of British tennis-parents. *Journal of Sport Sciences*, 27(4), 339-351. [DOI: 10.1080/02640410802603871]
- R2** Harwood, C.G., & Knight, C.J. (2009). Stress in youth sport: A developmental investigation of tennis parents. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10(4), 447-456. [DOI: [10.1016/j.psychsport.2009.01.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2009.01.005)]
- R3** Thrower, S. N., Harwood, C. G., & Spray, C. M. (2016). Educating and supporting tennis parents: A grounded theory of parents' needs during childhood and early adolescence. *Sport, Exercise & Performance Psychology*, 5(2), 107-124. [DOI: 10.1037/spy0000054]
- R4** Thrower, S. N., Harwood, C. G., & Spray, C. M. (2017). Educating and supporting tennis parents: An action research study. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 9(5), 600-618. [DOI: 10.1080/2159676X.2017.1341947]
- R5** Thrower, S. N., Harwood, C. G., & Spray, C. M. (2018). Educating and supporting tennis parents using web-based delivery methods: A novel online education program. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(3), 303 - 32R [DOI: 10.1080/10413200.2018.1433250]
- R6** Harwood, C. G., Thrower, S.N, Slater, M.J., Didymus, F.F & Frearson, L. (2019). Advancing our understanding of psychological stress and coping among parents in organized youth sport. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01600]

All publications were subject to rigorous peer review in foremost sport psychology journals. The Lawn Tennis Association supported **R1** and **R2** with £10k external funding (2006-2008).

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words).

The knowledge generated through this applied research provided tennis organisations with a greater, evidence-based understanding of the demands facing parents [**R1**, **R2**, **R3**, **R6**], and of the educational methods they could employ to improve parents' experiences, attitudes, and behaviour [**R4**, **R5**]. As a result, this research led to the following impacts:

##### 1. Improved duties of care through the development and implementation of national and international tennis parent education programmes

###### a. The LTA's Tennis Parent Education Strategy

In 2016, given the findings of Harwood's research [**R1-R5**] and an increasing number of reported concerns of poor parental behaviour in junior tennis [**S1**], the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) approached Prof. Harwood to collaborate on the development of a National Parent Education strategy. The LTA strategy aimed to increase the level of care and attention to parents as the 'forgotten stakeholder' [**S1**] and improve the LTA's support provision in order to positively influence both the behaviour and experiences of parents. A specific target group were parents of those 7500 'regularly competing juniors' aged 9-14 years, in order to foster and retain their growing interest and investment in the sport [**S1**].

From zero strategic investment in this area, the LTA has invested £[REDACTED] on delivering a new programme to parents, with Harwood working alongside three intra-organisational teams within the LTA's competitions department [**S1**]. Knowledge and educational resources were drawn from

**[R1-R6]** and tailored into practical and inclusive strategies that represented the LTA's increasing responsibility to care for its parent stakeholders **[S1;S2]**. These strategies and resources included:

1. The Competition Parenting Workshop (CPW). A 2hr in-person parent education workshop based on **[R1-R6]** to improve knowledge and parenting skills around tennis competitions. 30 LTA tutors were trained by Harwood to deliver these workshops nationwide.
2. A revised 'Start Competing Guide' for parents informed by **[R3-R5]** that assists parents at the start of their journey.
3. A series of four animated videos with voiceovers by children to guide parents on how to support them in tennis.
4. A LTA parents webpage for all resources and the CPW workshop booking portal **[S3]**.
5. The establishment of a 10-member National Parent Advisory Group to feedback parental concerns to the LTA, with representatives from all UK regions and home nations.

Integration of the strategy influenced operational systems, workloads, and staff objectives across the entire LTA Competitions team with yearly KPI's set and monitored **[S2; S1]**. The reach of the strategy was subsequently extended to LTA referees and officials who received education and gained support materials for their tournaments **[S2]**. The LTA Head of Competition **[S1]** noted:

*"The CPW has proved particularly popular and positive for parents, so much so that we decided to integrate the educational content into all five of our LTA Regional referee and officiating roadshows and two National officiating conferences in 2017 and 2018. We reached 319 (52%) of the nation's junior tournament referees - the core of our workforce - through these presentations, and the programme feedback along with our tournament support posters has been no less than excellent."*

In 2020, the sustained impact of the strategy across the LTA organisation led to the creation of new LTA 'County Parent Representative' roles **[S4]** as the Head of Competition **[S1]** highlighted:

*"One of the notable points I have is that this parent education strategy has lasted and been sustained into its 5th year, when normally we might see a lot of 'stop and change' in NGB programmes. The result of this sustained work is that we are now enabling our counties – through new LTA county parent representative 'roles' – to further drive our impacts across our 38 counties at local level"*

#### **b. The ITF's Global Tennis Parent Education Strategy**

In 2018, the success of the LTA strategy led to interest from the International Tennis Federation - the organisation responsible for supporting tennis participation in its 192 member nations worldwide. The ITF also acknowledged its lack of a coherent, evidence-based strategy for supporting parents and resolved to implement a strategy that was accessible to parents of all member nations. This involved prioritising investments in translation into multiple languages through the ITF's translation team **[S5]**. In 2019, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the ITF, LU, and LTA was formed to collaborate on advancements in parent education and share resources that would enable a multi-lingual international programme **[S6;S5;S1]**.

Through this MOU, the CPW workshop was licensed to the ITF free of charge, translated into Spanish, and piloted successfully to parents in Madrid through cooperation with the Royal Spanish Tennis Federation. The ITF subsequently invited Professor Harwood to train the ITF's 10 international development officers as workshop tutors for their continental regions, each responsible for tennis development in up to 20 countries. The ITF's Head of Participation and Coaching **[S5]** explained how the ITF then adapted to COVID-19:

*"In March and April 2020, we were scheduled to deliver workshops in Iran, Chile, and El Salvador which were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, applying Professor Harwood's research and working with him during COVID-19 allowed us to pivot towards a digital strategy and create two multilingual e-learning modules for parents of beginner players and those with competition experience. Launched in May and July 2020, these modules were made available to parents in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Russian languages"*

The ongoing success of the ITF strategy [noted in the section below] brought about a change in management and operational practice leading to a role change by the ITF from 'Head of Participation and Coaching' to 'Head of Participation and Education'. The ITF Head of Participation and Education [S5] clarified this decision:

*“One impact I am most proud of from this strategy is how as an organisation we have realised that it is our duty to educate parents and involve them in helping us achieve our tennis participation goals. Without parents, tennis is almost impossible, and education is key to participation. The strategy highlighted that it was inappropriate to have coaching in my title because my role and remit speaks beyond coaches. Hence, my title changed to Head of Participation and Education to reflect our inclusive responsibilities to parents”.*

## **2. Global parental engagement and improved parenting confidence, behaviour and parent-child experiences**

The LTA and ITF strategies together have engaged and educated several thousand parents since their implementation. To census date, the LTA webpage has attracted 14,360 unique users with 11,009 views of the short, animated video series. 1598 'Start Competing' guides have been downloaded, and the Competition Parenting Workshop (CPW) has been delivered 124 times nationwide through the LTA tutor network. This workshop has been attended by 1753 parents of regularly competing juniors (~25% of the target market) [S2], with the LTA adapting to provide seven free nationwide online CPW workshops for parents during COVID-19. Post-workshop feedback from over 350 parents is consistently above the 90th percentile in terms of 'programme excellence', 'intentions to apply skills and knowledge', and 'overall satisfaction'. [S1; S3].

From their international promotion and launch in May and July 2020, the ITF e-learning modules have been completed by 2359 parents from 137 countries [S5]. This means that 4112 parents have completed a formal educational workshop or online module across the LTA or ITF programmes. In addition, in September 2020, as the Head of Participation and Education reported:

*“...the ITF held its first ever international parent education webinar with 632 registrants from 108 countries. Delivered with Professor Harwood, this webinar achieved a 9.3/10 satisfaction score; one of the highest we've ever had. The feedback and gratitude from parents has reinforced our flexible strategy to now deliver the full workshop as multilingual webinars in 2021, with current work ongoing to present the modules and workshops in Arabic.” [S5]*

In 2019, the benefits of the CPW were evaluated for the LTA via a longitudinal research trial on 130 parents and their children. Assessments were taken pre-workshop (i.e., prior to parental attendance), and post-workshop attendance at one month and three-month follow-up intervals. Analysis of the data highlighted positive changes in parents' and children's motivation, as well as children's perceptions of their parents' behaviour at competition. Parents reported experiencing lower levels of negative emotions around competition, and enhanced perceptions of confidence in how to support their child before, during and after matches [S7; S1]. Qualitative data [S7] provided by over 100 parents and children corroborated these improvements, with parents stating:

**Example 1:** *“It's been fantastic. I've adopted the recommendations and my daughter has embraced them. She's happier on court, my perspective has improved and so I'm enjoying going whereas I didn't previously. Consequently, my daughter looks more relaxed and is playing better as demonstrated by her results.”*

**Example 2:** *“My son mentioned that the feedback I give them is honest but helps identify process areas to improve, which he finds really valuable. It is less stressful as a parent to focus on the process rather than the outcome and is healthier for long term improvement [...]. I have adopted these approaches across different sports too - hockey and cricket.”*

Such improved behaviours have been observed by competition officials and coaches who regularly interact with tennis parents and their children. A senior GB referee [S8] remarked:

*“I feel that the workshop has impacted on parental behaviour, and specifically one thing I have noticed is that far more parents are saying things like 'enjoy' or 'have fun' when their*

*child goes onto court. I think that this takes some of the pressure off the child thereby reducing the likelihood of them behaving badly on court – this in turn takes pressure off me as a referee”.*

In congruence, the Director of a tennis centre reported on the value of the workshop to his coaching and support to a player and his father [S9]:

*“Over the past six months I have clearly seen a less withdrawn boy on court, a father who watches from afar and who is far less demonstrative. He now comes to me after training sessions to discuss how the lesson went in a far less intense manner and in one that is more supportive of the child. The parent is also less defensive when areas for the child’s development are discussed such as weaknesses. Being part of this workshop has allowed me to engage with a father and to see some genuine impacts on the parent, player and their interactions with me”.*

Importantly, we conclude with the views of children who articulated how they have noticed their parent’s attitude and behaviour change in ways that have improved their tennis experience [S7]:

**Example 1:** *“She has got better at being at competitions, I used to feel nervous when she was watching now I don’t.”*

**Example 2:** *“My mum is more relaxed and we discuss how I would like her to behave while I’m playing. She now gives her feedback to my coach who then works on that with me at my next coaching session.”*

**Example 3:** *“He has become better at understanding that I cannot always win and he can now give me better pointers of how to become better than I am but in a better way so I find it interesting and fun. When I am playing he doesn’t get as stressed out as he used to. He knows that every match I try my best and that the score doesn’t always matter”.*

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of ten references)

Key	Source	Reference to:
S1	Letter – Keith Carder, Head of Competition, LTA	Impact #1a and #2
S2	KPI tracking table for parent education strategy – LTA Competitions Department	Impact #1a and #2
S3	<a href="https://www.lta.org.uk/play-compete/getting-started/information-for-parents/">https://www.lta.org.uk/play-compete/getting-started/information-for-parents/</a> - LTA’s parent education webpage and portal	Impact #1a and #2
S4	Job description for LTA County Parent Representative posts	Impact #1a
S5	Letter – Miguel Crespo, Head of Participation & Education, ITF	Impact #1b and #2
S6	Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) – ITF, LU, and LTA	Impact #1
S7	Executive report to LTA of LU’s evaluation of the CPW	Impact #2
S8	Letter – Alison Jackson, Senior GB Junior Competitions Referee	Impact #1a and #2.
S9	Letter – Damian Fuller, Director of Tennis, Bradfield Tennis Centre	Impact #1a and #2