Q: Dr. Lauer, what are your views on basic life skills the tennis industry can focus on to encourage all tennis facilities to be engaged in?

A: I believe many life skills are important to developing good people and good tennis players. Developing communication skills for example are paramount to achievement in any walk of life. In addition, time and energy management are essential in the process of striving for excellence. I also believe resilience, while a performance skill, is just as important or more important in life. With any of these life skills we see better development when the skill is defined, examples are given of its benefit and its utility, and opportunities are made available to practice these skills followed by reflection and feedback. Life skills are not caught, they are taught over time.

Q: It was mentioned that each of the 9 pros interviewed wanted to quit in teenage years. How did the parents, coaches, and kids deal with it and overcome this adversity?

A: In different ways, but mostly they had conversations with the player and didn’t overreact. Some took breaks and learned that they wanted to come back and the parents allowed for this break. For others it was just a thorough exploration of the investment they made and also what tennis means to them was important. Coaches played a huge role in this.

Q: What is one of the best ways to keep kids doing other sports to learn other physical skills even though they want to focus on tennis?

A: You can Add athletic development / multi-sport activities to your tennis program as part of warm-up and the "fitness" sessions. This will help learn the many physical skills required for tennis players.

Q: Dr. Lauer, can you address how to encourage a growth mindset?

A: I really cannot do this question justice without mentioning the book "Mindset" by Dweck. I would read this if you haven’t. I’ve reviewed this website and it has many good recommendations and exercises to be used with youth https://www.mindsetworks.com/
Directly in tennis and developing a growth mindset, this information comes from our national coaches and myself.

What can Coaches do to Facilitate a Growth Mindset?

• Develop a coach-athlete relationship based on trust. The player must know that you are competent, will follow-through on what you say, and that you “have their back”.

• Reinforce constantly with our players that effort leads to positive outcomes in the short- and long-term, and give them multiple personal examples as well examples of other athletes.

• Reinforce focusing every day on being the best we can be. The PROCESS.

• Talk about learning as fun. Address challenges as exciting; what a great opportunity to play the #1 seed, for example. Help them focus on the journey of personal development.

• Talk about competing against all kinds of competition as fun. Spin it so the mindset is open and willing to work.

• Discuss with players effective ways to learn (journaling, reflection, open dialogue with coach...).

• Practice after a match. This reveals your commitment to the process of getting better, and not overemphasizing the result of any match.

• Reinforce journaling about striving for goals and progress daily.

• Ask questions and listen.

• Avoid permanent labels about players that feed a fixed mindset (Player A will never be good, his backhand is terrible).

• Remove performance contingences put in place by families such as going to dinner after winning but not after a loss. Or, reactions to performances – being more warm after a win versus a loss.

• Use competitive games in practice to challenge their process focus. Having a growth mindset doesn’t mean you like to lose or don’t care, it means you realize the development is as important as or more important than winning.

• Set process goals with the player for each tournament or match, have the player focus on these things prior to the match including visualizing them pre-match, and then have these be the performance cues that they encourage themselves on throughout the match.
Q: Would you prefer a parent to be present or drop off the child for the lesson?

A: It depends on whether the parent will be on court with the child at all during the week. If the parent is a parent/coach, and can help the child with the things he/she has just learned in the lesson, then it's helpful to have the parent present to learn. However, it's also good to give the child some space and let him/her work privately with the coach. The parent can watch from a few courts away. It's best to mix things up.