

Are Tennis Parents a Problem or a Scapegoat with Chris Michalowski?

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J: Welcome to the compete like a champion podcast where we explore the psychology of performance, advanced coaching and sports science through the lens of professional tennis. You're here with Dr. Larry Lauer, mental skills specialist, and coach Johnny Parkes with the USTA player development. Today's episode, parents a problem or the scapegoats? We're going to dive into some of the issues surrounding parenting behaviors and parenting coaching at tournament's and in practice and also the relationships that exist between coaches, parents and players, and maybe what that looks like. Maybe what's a healthy relationship, what's an unhealthy relationship. We're going to dive into these topics. So first of all, Dr. Lauer, Dr. Larry your thoughts, parents. Do you think they're the problem or scapegoat?

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L: Well, I think we want to talk about that and I believe that they're probably both right and in the way that we look at their involvement, but just looking at, you know, a video that I saw online a few months ago, the football coaches in the handshake line throwing haymakers at one another and it made I think, good morning America. Clearly there are issues. It's not just in tennis, but I know in tennis we do have quite a few concerns. Maybe you want to share some of the recent ones that have come out?

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J: Yeah, I mean it's actually quite frequently we get feedback from tournament directors or other parents' experiences at tournaments. And you know, it's sometimes very tough to, to listen to some of the things that you're hearing, especially when it comes to some parenting behaviors, even like U10 tournaments, you know, and begs the question if you even should have U10 tournaments.

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L: That's a good question.

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J: But that maybe that's a separate topic to discuss, but uh, because at that age the experience should be about having fun developing skills, and learning how to implement those skills, right, as you go along. But, um, but regardless, so I mean, I've got a couple of things here that I wrote down. Just some, uh, just some thought and not some thoughts with some feedback that I'd heard recently. Um, and this, this one came from, um, um, a couple different referees and tournament directors. But basically in a nutshell it's about parenting behaviors. We have parents cussing at tournament desk volunteers, uh, um, potentially because matches where we're behind schedule. We have parents dragging their kids into the parking lot, yelling at them after matches, whether it was after a loss or whether it's because they didn't call a line call, didn't call a line call correctly or, um, you know, they got the score wrong. You know, crazy things like that. I mean, parents that are threatening officials in front of their kids, um, at 10 and under events because they couldn't get practice courts before their match went on, so they thought they had an unfair advantage. Um, and so on and so on. And I think you've got the point. And so it, it's really hard to, to hear these, these comments, uh, because I mean, clearly that's a problem,

you know, and we can be good to go and dive into a little bit more of the issues surrounding that. And I have my thoughts and theories, but, um, I think the professionalization of, of tennis from a young age is a big, big part that is surrounding that on top of I think may be, you know, some cultural norms that have developed in standards, the different generations that are now having kids and I think there's a lot into the mix, but the, certainly the professionalization around tennis has led to this behavior that is treating 9, 10, 11, 12 year olds as many pros training them as many pros therefore trying to yield results. Like, you know, many pros, which is pretty unrealistic.

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L: Why do you think things have gotten professionalized if that's the case? Why is that happening?

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J: Well, I think over time there's been this model, uh, you know, this kind of Academy model that's developed, I don't know from where maybe from Spain, Spain started dominating or especially on the men's side started dominating, you know, in the, in the 2000's and 1999 the, the, their structures were centered around the four hour day model with an hour of quote, quote fitness. Um, you know, and I think that that we've obviously gone ahead and adopted a model similar to that. And you know, again, I don't know the origins of it, but because of that, we have more investment of from parents into that, whether their, their investments with the future belief that the, uh, son or daughter is going to earn a scholarship. So that's going to save money in the long run via, you know, via either scholarships or whether it's because maybe the parents living vicariously through that child, they see that child enjoying something. So then they want to give them everything and they get a little bit carried away. I mean, I don't know. I mean there's, there's, there's other reasons I think, but certainly that professionalization has led to this creation of, uh, an unhealthy environment where there's too much pressure being placed on the child from too early or too early of an age.

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L: I would agree. And I think it's, this is a complex issue. I think it's, you know, the proliferation of this idea that uh, everyone can be a star and we know from research with millennials and now we're into this generation Z, um, timeframe, you know, with, with children who were born, I think it's after 9/11 that their goals are not, uh, the same as the goals maybe that our generation had, uh, or the generations before us. Their goals are to be on YouTube and be a star, to uh, be an actor, an actress, to be an astronaut. And I'm not saying these things are bad, but obviously these are the very small minute. And part of that is to be a professional athlete. And we all had those dreams when we were young. I dreamed about being professional baseball player and the issue is not the dream because kids should have those dreams, but it's what the adults are doing with that. So the adults, let's, let's start with the parents. I think they take it upon themselves to provide everything possible to try to achieve that dream. And they see this sparkle. Maybe their kid shows some talent at an early age or some skill. And they, they take that and say, wow, we've got a shot. Maybe we can get that DI scholarship. And that changes the whole way they go about their business. And so first you gotta look at what's driving this whole thing, the goals.

But also we've got to look at the industry. A lot of people making a lot of money off parents making the decision to have their kids train year round, to be in sport every day, to specialize early to do this year-round training. You know, all these facilities that popped up around the country, um, are, are banking on people spending more and more money in, in youth sport.

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J: Well, and there wasn't that, a few a few years ago, there wasn't that necessity to, to pay for every opportunity to play a sport. Right? I mean, because PE was more prominent and, uh, in, in curriculums and schools. So kids were getting that satisfied via via a lot of exposure to PE, a lot of different sampling of sports and, and we all know, I mean, that's kind of disappearing in, in schools, which I think is tragic. But the, and that's led to, okay, so if my kid's going to be physically active and play a sport, then I've got to go and find the program and pay for it. And on top of that, you have a lot of programs that will try and get them into that full, and I'm talking maybe 10 and even 10 and under here, that full five day a week model, which of one sport, which again is that definition of kind of early specialization. But again that, that that's led to the professionalization. So now that training full five times a week with matches, that is professionalization of a sport

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L: And, and money is driving this thing, right? Because the messaging that parents are getting is that you need to spend the money. You need to, you need to make sure your child's getting every opportunity. You know, it's similar to, you know, when you have a child and all these companies tell you to keep your child safe, you have to have this, you have to have all these monitors and this newest baby, whatever right, all this stuff and you spend all this money because you don't want to be the parent that didn't provide for your child and then had them be unsafe. And they do the same thing with sport. Oh your, your child's interested in, in a sport. Well you got to do these clinics, all these leagues and you need to travel and play these games and you've got to get it early. Got to get it early. You don't want to get behind, don't want to get behind these other kids are getting it. That kid across the street is getting more than you are and they play upon those fears of the parents that if you don't do more and more and more, you will have not provided for your child, which goes against the science of what we know about growth and development.

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J: Yeah. And uh, yeah, exactly. And to go along with that we have, because of that professionalization of sport, we then have the countering to that which is tennis is an expensive sport. We know that it's no secret. Um, what's come with that is with a lot of traveling, lot of traveling means more expense. So parents are stepping up to save probably some cost on the training costs. By trying to educate themselves in how to help their kids become better tennis players. Now a lot of parents out there, my have good backgrounds in tennis, in which case they've got already some prior knowledge and experience on how to help help that child. Um, but we might have a lot of parents out there that may not have the means and they also then they may not have the knowledge. Um, again, I'm not saying that's a bad thing. I think that's great. The, that that parents involvement is wanting to help that kids get better, wants to help them play a

sport that they love and enjoy. But I think there's a fine balance between when we can, when we can help and when we have to go and seek help.

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L: Well, look, we know from the research that's been done, qualitative research that most athletes getting, get involved in sport because their parents were involved in sport. They're introduced to it through their parents. They were surrounded by it at a young age. So mom and dad watching sport on TV, talking about sport, uh, going to sporting events and definitely being engaged in sport themselves. So you, you typically see that athletic parents, not just because genetics, but because of the environment they put them in or having children who are involved in athletics and including in tennis. And then in this country there's very much a societal norm that parents are children's first coaches, which is fine because it's a volunteer run, pretty much use for it. Right. And had the automatic teachers from birth, right. They have to be. And so sport is no different. The sport is no different. But I think we understand that. But the issue that we have is that parents believe that they know how to coach. Just because they're a parent and that is wrong. It's wrong. 100% wrong. Coaching is one of the hardest jobs on the planet. So just treating it like, Oh I'm a parent so I know how to coach. Now you don't know Jack, you need to get yourself educated. You need to be mentored by someone who knows how to teach a sport but also has a philosophy about developing young people in a healthy way.

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J: Well absolutely. The, and I don't want to, I don't want to just say on here and and kind of rag on like bad parenting behavior cause I think we've also got very good examples. I wrote some good examples of what I witnessed as some national tournament's to share and what we've got out there are some parents with a really good approach to how they watch their children play and they're by the side of the court, that cheering for their child hitting a winner, they're cheering for their opponent hitting a winner and that you know they are making sure that fairplay's being instituted. They kiss and hug their child after they win, they kiss and hug their child after they lose. And it's a very supportive behavior that I, that I was able to witness and I think some tournaments do a really good job of promoting parent sportsmanship. I went to the boys 12 and 14 nationals in Mobile, Alabama this year and they always do an unbelievable job at that tournament. I'm, I'm so impressed with how they put that together and you can give tokens to parents for good sportsmanship and good behavior. And I thought that was incredible because they promoted that, that synergy of everyone encouraging everyone and obviously everyone wants to win, but it didn't create this negative environment of just picking on each other and trying to get some sort of minor edge by, you know, looking at a kid in the wrong way or looking at another parent with a scowl on their face. Yeah. Like, you know what I mean? Come on. Well this is, this is, you know, love, enjoy watching your kids play and support them in what they do and give them helpful feedback when they're winning. Give them helpful feedback when they're losing, but, but be willing to listen also. And I think that that's a really good supportive structure that a child can, can have in their life with a sport.

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L: Well, I mean parents are intimidating for young people, for our kids. Right? So, you know, imagine people listening, you can think back to when you are an athlete, when you're a younger and a parent of another child said something about you or came towards you, um, somewhat aggressively or you were taken aback. Right? That's intimidating as a young person. And I don't think that adults remember what it's like to be a child and to be in front of others and trying to perform. Now let's put this in tennis. It's tough. You're out there by yourself. You haven't even learned the game yet. You need another 10 years to develop your skill where you can do things consistently and you're being judged and being asked to win right now. It's honestly crazy. But going back to your point, I know we're harping a little bit on the bad behaviors that we see, but the majority of parents are doing the right things.

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J: Yeah.

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L: The majority and they're making good decisions. They're there making sure that tennis is being done with perspective, that they're not playing too much, that they're letting their child have fun. They're giving them unconditional love and support and, and for those parents listening, that's the number one thing is unconditional love and support. That's what your child needs no matter what. When that becomes contingent on performance, you got problems, you're going to have anxiety, you're going to have issues between parent and child and it can lead to mental health issues. Cause I've seen it many times and it can lead to some very serious mental health concerns. When a child feels like the love and support they're getting from their parents is contingent upon a performance which they don't fully control, right. Parents, let me remind you that the other person on the other side of the net is there to stop your child from winning the match to frustrate them. Right? I mean that's, you have two people going back and forth. Your child's going to lose points. They're going to make mistakes, they're going to lose matches, they're going to make mistakes as part of the process of getting better and learning of sports. So I think we get too hung up early on on winning. Again, going back to this idea of professionalization, you need to do it right now because if you don't, you're behind. You're behind. You need to do more. You need to spend more money, you need to travel more. You need to play more tournaments. You need to get more specialized training because you're behind, you're behind behind. You're not going to get that scholarship. You're not going to get what you want and you will have failed as a parent and you know, you talked about it.

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J: I get a lot of pressure by you just saying that.

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L: But this is what, this is what people put upon parents. So I get it. Parents out there. I'm a parent too. There's pressures put upon you by society, by the media, by the industry. You have to be stronger than that and say, look, I know what makes sense, but we talk about living through the child, and that's part of this. But Jay Coakley, who's a sports sociologist in Colorado, Northern Colorado, I believe. He talked about how it's not just living through the child, but actually parents, self-worth as a parent is being determined by their child's achievement.

And so you think about that. How I feel about myself is partially determined by how my child does. That's huge, because now you're going to start to make decisions that you wouldn't have made before. Decisions that, you know what? This is about me. So my child needs to perform. Right. And then there's another great theory, achievement by proxy theory that suggests that the issues start to happen when parents objectify their children, when they become objects or a means to an end. So the, the, the goal change is not that the goal is for my child to enjoy the experience, to get better, to make friends. It becomes about them as a tool to get a performance, to get an outcome to, to win, to be better than the other parent's children, to get a scholarship to be the all star. Right. And when that goal changes because of a need I have inside of me as an adult, this is very insidious and this is a big problem because you start making decisions that on the outside looking in from someone else, be like, how could they ever do that? Why would they ever grab their child by the arm pulling them into the parking lot? That's because the goals have changed. That's what's driving that. So as parents, we gotta be really aware of ourselves and how we're treating sport, how we're looking in sport and remember that this is for our children. This is not our sport, it's theirs. Our job is just to give them an opportunity to play as much as we feel that we can and we don't have to do more, let them let it be their sport.

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J: I mean know the event ultimately supposed to privilege the play on. I don't think everyone gets the opportunity to do it anymore. Like you know, again, dissipate in PE, like sport was a privilege and we need to teach, like, teach it that way. You are lucky to be playing this sport and being able to have fun and play with friends and get competitive and learn all the lessons that you're going to learn that a sport teaches you organically as well.

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L: Yeah, I mean, and you think the people who take the time to volunteer or actually are getting paid to coach, do you need to trust them? If now, do your homework as a parent, have they had a background check? Did they, are they being educated, does the national governing body for, so in our case in tennis, uh, have they, have they done some kind of coach training? And if they have then let them coach and be appreciative of the opportunity they're giving your child and also be appreciative of those tournament organizers and those people working in those terms. Because if they weren't there, your child couldn't play. There'd be no opportunity. And Oh by the way, if other kids didn't sign up to play, your child couldn't play either. So if that kid doesn't show up for the match, your child doesn't get to play. So be respectful of that family and have that kid that they're actually taking the time, spending the money to be there so that your child can also play.

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J: Yeah. Yup. Spot on. Well listen, we've got a real live case example in the studio here, so we're going to involve him.

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M: Oh no..

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L: You should be concerned.

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J: We have coach Mick, we have Chris Michalowski, who's our director of experiential learning here at the campus and he's also the mastermind behind our podcast right here. So this screen thing behind this and this whole set up, this is because of Mick. So we're, we're greatly appreciative, but Mick has a beautiful family and he has a, he has children that play tennis and we were actually walking over to the studio yesterday and I watched his son was hitting on the ball machine, which is a lost art. Being able to just hit, you know, take yourself a racket and a ball hit up against the tennis wall, take a ball machine going, strike some balls. It's great to see, I don't see it very much anymore. So anyway, I came in here and I was like, you know, kids looking good, like well, what's been going on? I mean, it's obviously nothing to do with you, but you know.

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L: You've got a new coach. The wall.

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M: His name is Wally, by the way.

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L: His name is John Wall.

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J: But listen, I mean, so you know, I've seen you out on the campus, you've been coaching your son and you had the basket out there and you're helping him out and then, you know, but just, let's just keep this open ended. I mean, tell us about your experiences of helping your son and then you've just mentioned to us earlier, the, you started in the past couple months taking a bit more of a back seat, but why don't you kind of take us through that journey and some of the experiences that you've gone through.

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M: Well, he kinda started really young, and he was, all I want to do is play tennis. When I was teaching the summer program and at the high school in Trevor city, Michigan, he would hit on the wall for six hours. And if I didn't take him, he'd cry. And I thought, Oh, this is great and my kid's going to be like the best player in the world. He's going to be number one. All that stuff. And he loved it. And then all of a sudden he got some friends. So then he was like, dad, can I throw the football with Jake instead of go hit against the wall? I'm like, you don't want to do that. You know? And so now you already see the parent in you and the coach are kind of butting heads there. Yeah. And you know, the one thing that, that I think parents need to understand, and me especially because when he was about seven, I made him cry once I said, I'll never do that again. And I didn't even think I was being tough on him. I was talking to him just like I talked to all my other students. But what I forgot to realize was that I was his dad and so he hears it differently from me. So, so what I said was, okay, I'll never let that happen again. But you know, coaches understand longterm athletic development. They understand 10 years down the road or parents don't understand that because they're spending all this money right now and they're looking at the, you know, they're looking on the return of investment. And I told Harrison, my son, I said, Hey the the minimum investment you need to give me if I'm going to invest my money, you at least have to invest your time. You're not, I don't care if you're number one in the world or you play college or not. If

you have fun, that's great. And if I keep that mindset, then I think I'm pretty solid. But if I start to go down that route of, you know, I just spent all this money, we're playing all, it's all these tournaments and your rankings going down and we're really doing the right thing, things like that, then I'm making the wrong decision. And, and so, so anyway, I started hitting with him throughout his career. He knew he was about top 30 in the Midwest. We came down here zero points again, and it just, as he gets older, it's a little bit tougher because you can't cross that line. And like I told him, I said, I'd rather be a good dad than a good coach for sure. And I'd rather be a good dad than a bad coach especially. But I'd never want to be a good coach and a bad dad. That's what I don't want. So I told him, and this was a little more personal, but as a coach, as his coach, and he wants me to be his coach, he's expecting me. I'm expecting him rather to do these things as a normal coach would. And if he's not doing these things, then I just feel like, okay, I'm not inspiring enough. Maybe he needs another coach. So I told him, Hey, we're going to take a little bit of time off right now because what I'm expecting from you, other things are getting in the way. And as a coach, that makes it difficult for me to coach you. And so...

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J: Is there a comfortability factor too? Maybe in that like obviously I was very comfortable as you cause you're his dad, so when you're asking him to do extra things, like I'm sure you're asking him to do things around the house or whatever. Does he see doing some of those extra things within tennis as like a, almost like a chore? Right? Like no kids like doing chores. So does that, does that, is that where the lines kind of cross over a bit?

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M: Yeah, somewhat, but for my son, he's out here hitting more than most anybody else in his group. Anyway, He, he goes out on his own. But if I ask him, there's just that difference. That's the dad. It's like when your dad tells you something, there's immediately, there's like, well, is that right or not? There's just, I don't know what that is. Dr. Lauer, I'm sure can answer that better than I can.

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L: Well, I think that, uh, there's a little bit of part of the child that, you know, they don't, they don't want to be told what to do by the parent. Right. They're trying to separate and be their own person. Right. So it's harder emotionally for a child when it's coming from the parent. Um, because that's laced with a whole lot of other emotional experiences. If it's a coach, third party coach, you're not, it doesn't have all those attached experiences in history right. The times that, um, he got upset on a court or, and I'm sure, Mick, you're a great guy. So, uh, no I really mean that, uh, that you, you've done it very well, but.

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M: Even in my pink elephant suit?

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L: Yes. Wow. Yeah. That's, that's a different episode. Um, but that's what it is. And you'll often hear parents say, well, you know, I need you to tell them what I would tell them. I'm like, well, I'm not quite sure I want to do that because I have my own ideas. But the point is that because it's coming from the parent,

that's hard to hear because of that emotional investment on both sides. Trust me, it'll happen to you too.

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J: Listen, I've already got my kids set up with racket balls, soccer ball. All she wants to do when I get home is she wants me to grab her hands and kick a football around. And I go, this is great. I'm going to get her kicking with her left, kicking with right, get her swinging a racket with her left with her right and then I go, hold on Johnny, hold on, hold on. Just you know, remember what you know.

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M: Yeah. That is the trap right there. That you fall, that you crossed that line.

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J: Yeah. All right, so we have a question here from Jorge. Jorge, Thanks for listening in. Do you have any recommendations about parents being in the court during private lessons? That is a toughie, but we'll answer it. So I think, you know, let me take a stab at this one and then you guys can chime in with your thoughts. So I think in my experience with coaching, you know, it spans really from coaching beginners 4,5 years old all the way through to traveling with players on the pro tour so that I've had a lot of parents interaction at all the different stages, different ages, different levels, you know, players competing, USTA tournaments. The, the whole, you know, the whole lots. But, um, I always had a line and really it was the beginner line and I always thought that when I have kids that come to me for the first time four, five, six, seven year olds, I think having the parent there on the side of the court to keep supporting them and encouraging to do something was very important. The factor too, part of the enjoyment of it. Because the kid is scared that trying something for the first time. They want that validation. They look over to their parents a lot. Yes. But it's more for that validation that you're doing great. Like, you know, that's good, have fun, go do it. But then when I always get that feel to a point where I'd be like, okay, now they're comfortable coming here. They, you know, they run onto the court, they're excited to be here. I think that's the time that we now don't have parents on the court. So, and I'd always have groups at different stages. If I had players that were competing in tournaments, my, I mean, my rule with really any parent is no, you're not on the court. You're, you can watch from outside. That's not a problem. But if you're on the court, you are part of the lesson and you are not part of the lesson. You're paying me to deliver a lesson. And so I always thought my standard was that I wanted that full engagement and focus from the player. And not saying that the parent distracts them, but I think just the parent being there provides an automatic distraction. Whether you think it does or not, whether you say anything or whether you don't it that that is a distraction no matter what you think. So again, I don't mind parents watching, but being involved on the call is not part of my standards and I'm not willing to compromise my standards for anyone. So I always had parents that if they weren't comfortable with that, they were very welcome to go seek other coaches. Um, but that was just my standard. But again that the line was when I had really young kid,. Um, I didn't mind it so much because again, I wanted them, um, the kid to feel comfortable in the environment that they are in, to feel that that is a safe space. And I think the parent was part of providing that

space, safe space right at the beginning. But then they, I always explain to them, look, I'm okay with this now, but as soon as they get, you know, comfortable being on the court, then I would like you to be off the court so that they can be fully engaged in that lesson and all that. So there definitely was a line and, but the standards and the expectations were drawn out right from the beginning.

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L: And that's great. I think you gotta, along with that, I agree with that Johnny. You got to clarify roles and let the parents know what their influence is and, and, and how they can support so much and play a role because parents can do so much good when it comes to sport and, and letting them know, you know, during practice you're entrusting in me, so I have a plan. There's a reason why I'm doing what I'm doing. So allow me to do that. I might be focusing on just two things. You may see something else that you, you know is not right and I know it too. Or maybe you see something I don't because I'm focused on something important, but there's a reason why I'm not covering that right now. And you have to appreciate that and I'll explain that to you and let you know what the plan is and then letting them know how important it is for them to encourage your child, um, to talk to them afterwards, their child about what do you think about how things are going, um, to give them some space in the car ride home as well. Um, you know, finding the right time to have those conversations. But I think the parents can add so much to the experience, uh, meaning and depth to the experience for the child if they really play their role as a parent, being supportive, uh, supporting the coach as well, encouraging the child to work on things on their own when they're not with their coach. Um, you know, speaking the same language. There's so many good things that parents can do and, and many do. Um, but I think we as coaches need to do a really good job of explaining that and what, why that's important and what huge benefit that can have for their child. So, um, for me, I, I don't want parents coaching or on the court, uh, while I'm trying to coach because it's just confusion to be honest. And there really needs to be one voice and it really takes you off your plan if that person comes on court.

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J: Mick, what's your thoughts.

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M: Yeah, I agree 100%. The hard part is just that you bring the parent in and now they're comfortable and they're on the court and then I'll send you to say, okay, now that you're comfortable, it's time for you to kind of back off a little bit. A good parent understands that, but I think these days one thing that we've done is create even automated emails to parents for kids that are in their classes and say, Hey, it was a great lesson this week. Here's what your child can do this week out of class and this is one way you can help your child to prepare for the next one. Here's some drills you can do. As long as you're keeping a lesson plan that's consistent over a 10 week period, you can just send out this automated email sequence to parents and they say, boy, we can do these three drills. So this was great. And now they feel a little bit more engaged and involved and they can say whatever they want. And when you're not around them, I mean they're going to do what they do as parents. But I think that's just

a good way to say, Hey, I want to include you, but this is your role. This is my role.

[30:55](#)

L: Yeah. Good. Very good. Yeah, that's, that's great Mick. So, you know, I, I think that, you know, when it comes to parents, again, we don't want to come off like, uh, parents are the worst thing that ever happened. Parents are the most important part of this whole process after the kids because they have the most influence on their, on their children. And I think that there's a, there's a couple of key things. You know, why, why is, is there a common perception that parents are a problem? Well, because we tend to hold, as I mentioned, another podcast about being positive. We tend to remember the negative experiences, right, as coaches. So you remember those parents that created problems for us, who, who were controlling, who didn't trust us, who interrupted us. So that, that's one thing. And remembering that most parents want to do the right thing, have good intentions, but they may not, they may not know what to do or how to, um, do things. Um, so I think that's important. I do think that, uh, there's a prevalence of parent coaches now who, beyond just the, the volunteer stage of the formative stage of I'm taking my kid to the local public court and I hit around with them and play around, you know, you have a prevalence so of high-performance players, let's say, who, whose parents were coaches. It's actually becoming more, I think, more and more prevalent, uh, where parents are continuing to coach their child into adolescence and staying in there even to late adolescence. And, you know, part of this to me is that, um, you know, parents are more involved than they have ever been in their children's lives. You go back a few generations, parents were at work, they weren't that involved in their children's lives. Children were in school, they did school activities, they came home, they did their homework, they played outside. Parents didn't necessarily play outside with them. Right? We played with the neighborhood kids and we came in, got a shower and got up and did it again. And parents are more involved than they have ever been. Part of it is because of a societal norm change and that, you know, parents are being held at such a high standard for raising their children, which I don't disagree with, but at the same time, um, you know, we have our own lives too and these children have their lives and we need to parent them, but we need to give them their space and let them, have their, their little friendships and their time to be children. Right? So we can't forget that. But, um, so there's a lot of pressure on parents these days. A lot of pressure on parents to do things right and to provide for their child. And if they're in sport, if their in tennis to give their child every possible opportunity that exists, it's expensive. It's time intensive. Um, many parents have honestly hurt the relationship with are their partner, their spouse because of this effort to help their child in tennis, separated with their, with their spouse, their partner because of it. Put themselves in bad straights financially because of their commitment to tennis and other sports, not just tennis. I'm hearing stories about people taking out second mortgages and you know, getting loans and, and I think at some point, um, we've got to remember what this is all about. Yeah. You know, we've got to remember what it's all about and it's about the children having fun, learning the game so they can stay in it the rest of their lives if they choose to. Um, if your child is a great tennis player. And you think

they can be, the best thing you can do is find them a good coach and get out of the way. Support them, be there for them, let do within perspective. Let them go practice in groups. You want the privates. Okay. But, uh, let them play other sports. We know that in many of the sports, while tennis especially in on the girls side, tends to be early specialization. In many sports. Um, the best athletes were multi-sport athletes even into late adolescence in the, in the high school, you know. Um, so I mean, I think there, I think we gotta just take a step back, understand there's a ton of pressures on the parents to make the decisions that they're making and we have to be able to step back and make choices that are based on a longterm development of the wellbeing of these children.

[35:23](#)

J: Yeah. I think ultimately everyone wants the best for their kid. I mean, that's what they want, right? Mick?

[35:30](#)

M: Oh yeah, for sure.

[35:32](#)

J: And I think we, we, I think we can find ways to obviously help support the parents think we can provide information hopefully like we've done with share bad practices, share good practices, um, you know, but I think we learn a lot by observing as well. So I think we can learn from other parents and I think we can help each other out with, with good, you know, what good sportsmanship looks like on both sides. Cause remember, I mean your kids are watching you as well, right? They're watching how you react, how you behave in certain situations.

[36:02](#)

M: No do overs.

[36:02](#)

J: Right,, there's no do over. So if your child at a tournament..

[36:06](#)

L: Have another child.

[36:07](#)

M: I got three do overs. I'm still working on it.

[36:10](#)

J: But essentially, right. Your child sees you yelling at a volunteer at a tournament. You've basically just taught your child that it's okay to yell at people that are trying to help you. Right. So again, we have to, we have to recognize it all. You know, parents are the, are the main teacher from birth and they're watching everything that you do, the way that you react, the way that you interact with others. And again, if it's, if you, if you wouldn't like to see that from yourself, if you don't want to see that in others, you don't like seeing that in others, then there's no reason that you should behave in that way. Because if you keep going in that manner, you're only teaching bad things to the, your child from basically a human element, right? From a human perspective of, you know, treat others how you would wish others to treat you. And so I think if you have that in mind, I mean, again, these are basic human behaviors on how we treat people and how we approach things. So I think that's also important to know that your children are watching you the way that you do things, that gets

absorbed. So with that, I think we're gonna wrap up. I mean, coach Larry, do you have anything else for the listeners?

[37:15](#)

L: Yeah, I mean I think we can, we're going to have a couple more episodes on parenting. Um, we'll have coach Lori Riffice, who's a national coach, uh, works in player ID and development and also her son Sam, is at the university of Florida playing tennis now, a highly, highly ranked junior, um, who's played many pro events and played the junior slams. So.

[37:36](#)

J: She's seen the whole pathway.

[37:37](#)

L: She has and she's such a great resource for parents. So we're gonna we're going to interview her on another podcast and we'll also speak to some other things including, you know, we really didn't spend much time on it, but coaches need to work with parents. And you mentioned this on, alluded to this, but they need to be able to work with the parents.

[37:56](#)

J: There needs to be a positive interactive relationship.

[37:58](#)

L: Yeah. So a couple of summary points for me from this. You know, I think first thing is that parents, we need you, um, you're important, you're highly influential. You are the biggest impact on your children at least until age, probably 12 or 13. Um, you set the base, you set the standard for the way your child sees the world, the way they interact with other people, their characters. So you know how important you are. You also know the pressures that you're under. And, and so we've gotta be able to make good decisions for your children's wellbeing. You know, we have a lot of resources, but please let us help you to do that. Hopefully this podcast is one of the ways to do that, but you gotta be involved, but in the right ways and in appropriate ways where letting the coach coach and, and certainly making us more about character than about, uh, you know, your needs, uh, your desire for them to be a great athlete, a great tennis player that can't trump, uh, doing the right thing in terms of developing a good young person who wants to use tennis as a vehicle to better their life and to have a good, good experience. So, I mean, I think we've got to keep that perspective. Um, we got to remember as children get older, I'm talking, you know, adolescents and the latte adolescents and this is hard for people to hear, but typically parents, they don't want you to coach them anymore. They're done with it and you need to be done with it too. So if your child, especially if they're high performance player, you may, you may be very good coach, but you might not be able to do what you need to do because you are a dad or because you're a mom. And so you need to, to get the support of other coaches who can come in and really, uh, be able to coach the player in a way that she needs to be or he needs to be coach that's being somewhat blocked because of the emotional connection between child and parents. So, yeah. So remember that, um, you know, at some point your child does not want you to coach them anymore and it becomes honestly a, a, a negative impact on them, on their, on their wellbeing because it starts to feel like pressure, it starts to feel like, uh, guilt into doing things, um, that the parents trying to hang on. And I think...

[40:15](#)

J: It could even feel like a loss, right? Like, like a child has lost a parent because it's that the boundaries and I think as coach Mick said, uh, you'd rather be known as a, you know, a good parent as opposed to a, sorry, you don't want to be known as a good coach and a bad parent. Right. You'd rather be... So it could almost feel like a loss, right?

[40:34](#)

L: Yeah, it could. So I'm really, I mean, I see this a lot in my, my work with athletes and specifically tennis players. Again, just a call out to the parents. You're so important and, and we appreciate you and respect you. We know how difficult it is being parents ourselves, but we need you to really be this, the voice of reason being a good perspective. Remember the longterm developments most important on winning and losing right now and at some point allowing your child to be coached by someone else. It's just what's best for them. Especially if they're a high performance player who spent many, many hours in their, their tennis every week. If you want to have a great relationship with your child when tennis is over, competitive tennis, then you need to back out at some point. I can't say it any more clearly. The research spells it out. My experience spells it out. Um, you know, I've, I've seen situations where, um, this just leads to serious mental health issues if we don't do this in a good way, so it's not worth it, it is not worth it. Parents, um, you know, enjoy the ride, but remember, it's their ride.

[41:44](#)

J: Yeah, that's, that's some great advice right there. Well I think as we wrap up this episode or compete like a champion for this week, uh, coach Mick, we'd like to thank you for joining us and, and providing us with your experiences with Harrison.

[41:57](#)

M: And thanks for having me.

[41:58](#)

J: Yeah, it's great. So coach Mick has a podcast called the PTM podcast. It's a, it's a great podcast. It connects with the, uh, professional tennis management degree. How many universities are doing it at the minute?

[42:12](#)

M: There's like eight or nine right now. We got more next year. It's also geared toward entry level pros as well. And actually anybody who's teaching tennis.

[42:19](#)

J: Yeah. I, it's a fantastic degree.

[42:25](#)

L: The parent coaches.

[42:25](#)

M: Yeah. I gotta do that one next.

[42:25](#)

J: You know, I think it's, I think it's pretty cool that now schools are picking up degree that specifically would gear them towards the, you know, the tennis professional world, whether it's club management, whether it's being a tennis pro teaching, coaching.

[42:39](#)

M: Hundred percent job placement too out of these programs. Yeah.

[42:42](#)

L: Wow. Yep. Wow. Okay.

[42:44](#)

J: That's great. So be sure to check out that podcast and more information. Um, so yeah, for more information specifically through player development, we have our website, www.playerdevelopment.usta.com if you go and take a look through that, we have a parent resource page that coach Lori does a phenomenal job working with. I'm working with Amy who takes care o,f takes care of the website for us. They put on some awesome, awesome resources. There's videos, there's a, I think there's research documents, there's, you know, there's other, there's other white pages, things like that that you can, that you can get some great info on. So please be sure to check that out. And again, if you have any questions at any point you can reach out to a Dr. Larry and myself, larry.lauer@usta.com or johnny.parkes@usta.com and we look forward to uh, having you listen to the next one. Take care. And that's a wrap on today's episode of compete like a champion. For more information and great resources. Visit our website playerdevelopment.usta.com and you can email us teamusa@usta.com this is Dr. Larry Lauer and coach Johnny Parkes signing off, until next time.

[44:16](#)

[inaudible].