

# THE LONG GAME

**Tennis Is a long journey**

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# Tennis Is a Long Journey

**Tennis is one of the most rewarding sports a child can learn. It develops coordination, concentration, courage, independence, and the ability to make decisions under pressure. It can offer friendships, healthy routines, competition, joy, and a lifelong connection to movement.**

It is also a complex sport.

When a child begins tennis at the age of five or six, their development may unfold over ten to twelve years or more. There is no fixed timetable, and no child's path is identical. But a meaningful tennis journey needs time, patience, and adults who understand that the player is developing not only strokes, but also a body, a mind, an identity, and a relationship with challenge.

The aim is not simply to produce early results. It is to help a young person develop the skills, resilience, and love of the game to stay involved for life.

## **What Needs to Go Well**

For tennis to become a positive long-term part of a child's life, several things need to develop together.

### **Enjoyment must last.**

A child does not need to love every training session or every match. But they need to feel that tennis remains a place of interest, belonging, and personal meaning—not only obligation or pressure.

### **Development must respect the child's stage of life.**

Tennis often progresses more quickly than the body, emotional world, or capacity to manage pressure. Training, competition, expectations, and goals need to be adjusted to the player's age, physical development, school life, and individual needs.

### **Healthy movement habits need time to develop.**

Sound technique is not built through rushed repetition or endless correction. It develops through purposeful practice, useful feedback, varied situations, and enough time for the player to understand how their body moves.

**Recovery is part of development.**

Rest, sleep, unstructured play, time with friends, and space away from competition are not signs of a lack of commitment. They help protect the player's physical health, motivation, and capacity to learn.

**The player's voice needs to grow.**

Young players need guidance, structure, and clear expectations. They also need to be heard. Over time, they should learn to ask questions, express concerns, make decisions, and take ownership of their own tennis journey.



# The Invisible Scoreboard

Tennis has a visible scoreboard: points, games, matches, rankings, and results.

But every young player also carries an invisible scoreboard. It quietly asks:

*Do I belong here?*

*Am I valued when I struggle?*

*Is it safe to make mistakes?*

*Can I be honest about how I feel?*

*Will I still be respected after a loss?*

These questions influence how a child learns.

**When a player feels emotionally safe with a coach, they are more open to instruction.** They are more willing to take risks, step outside their comfort zone, ask for help, and stay engaged when progress becomes difficult.

When a player feels judged, alone, or afraid of disappointing the adults around them, tennis can become a source of anxiety. They may stop taking risks, hide injuries or concerns, become overly focused on results, or quietly lose their enjoyment of the sport.

This is why trust between coach and player is not an optional extra. It is part of the foundation for learning.

## High Standards and Emotional Safety

Emotional safety does not mean low standards, constant praise, or avoiding difficult conversations.

A good coach sets expectations around effort, respect, commitment, and behaviour. They give honest feedback and help players meet demanding challenges. But they do this without humiliation, sarcasm, fear, or making the child feel that their worth depends on performance.

A player needs to know that a missed ball is information, not a verdict. A poor match is an experience to understand, not proof that they do not belong.



# Resilience grows through supported difficulty.

Children become stronger when they face setbacks with a trusted adult beside them—someone who remains calm, helps them reflect, and gradually enables them to find their own way forward.

# Preventing Burnout

Burnout rarely comes from one difficult match or one demanding training block. It often develops when tennis, school, family expectations, physical changes, friendships, and a child's own hopes become too much to carry at once.

The greatest risk is not simply pressure. It is pressure that feels lonely.

Parents and coaches need to watch for changes: a player who becomes unusually withdrawn, anxious, tired, self-critical, or afraid to attend training; a child who loses joy in the game but feels unable to say so; a player who is working harder while becoming less connected to themselves.

Open communication matters. A young player needs at least one adult in their tennis life whom they trust with their inner world—not only with their serve or forehand.

## **The Role of Parents and Coaches**

Parents and coaches do not need to agree on everything. But they need to work from the same broad purpose: to support the child's development, not use the child's tennis to fulfil adult ambition.

Parents can ask more than, "Did you win?" They can ask, "How did it feel?" "What are you proud of?" and "What would help next time?"

Coaches can offer more than technical instruction. They can listen, observe, set boundaries respectfully, and create a group environment where every player has a place.

Together, they can help the child understand that results matter—but they never determine human worth.



# The Real Goal

A healthy tennis journey may include competition, improvement, victories, losses, setbacks, friendships, and changing ambitions. Some players will pursue high performance. Others will find a sport they enjoy for life. Both paths can be successful.

The deepest measure of success is not only what a player achieves during their junior years. It is what they carry with them afterwards:

- *The confidence to meet difficulty.*
- *The ability to recover after failure.*
- *The courage to be themselves.*
- *The discipline to keep learning.*
- *And a lifelong love for tennis.*

The goal is not merely to develop a tennis player. It is to help a young person grow through tennis without losing themselves along the way.



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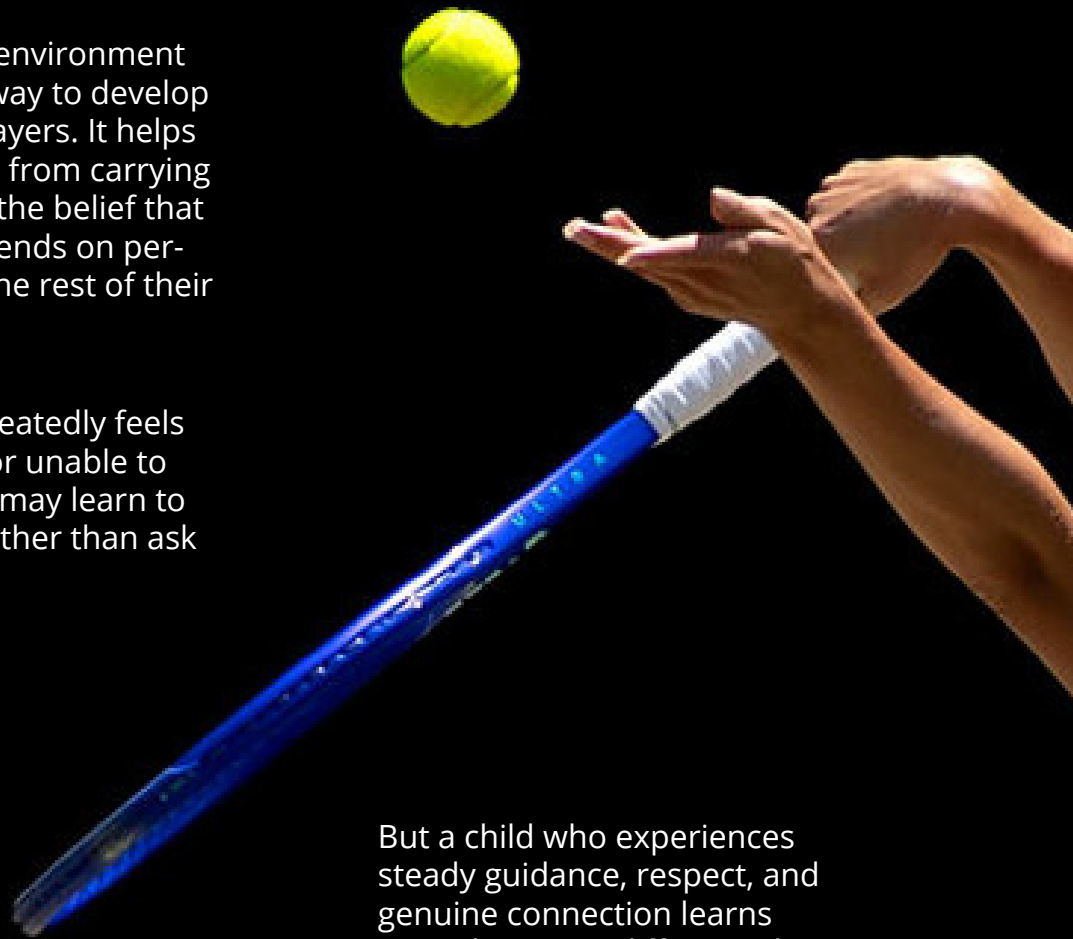
“This is why, after thirty-five years of coaching, I place emotional safety, open dialogue, and the protection of the person behind the athlete at the centre of my work.

Creating a safe environment is not simply a way to develop better tennis players. It helps protect children from carrying fear, shame, or the belief that their worth depends on performance into the rest of their lives.

A child who repeatedly feels alone, judged, or unable to speak honestly may learn to hide struggle rather than ask for help.

But a child who experiences steady guidance, respect, and genuine connection learns something very different: that difficulty can be faced, mistakes can be repaired, and they do not have to lose themselves in order to succeed.”

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*TENNIS IS MY SPORT*

In my blog, I share what I've learned from decades of working with players of all ages and skill levels. You'll find posts on technique, mental toughness, personal growth, and the deeper values that tennis teaches us.

**Tennis Know-How**

[www.longarnold.ch/blog](http://www.longarnold.ch/blog)

