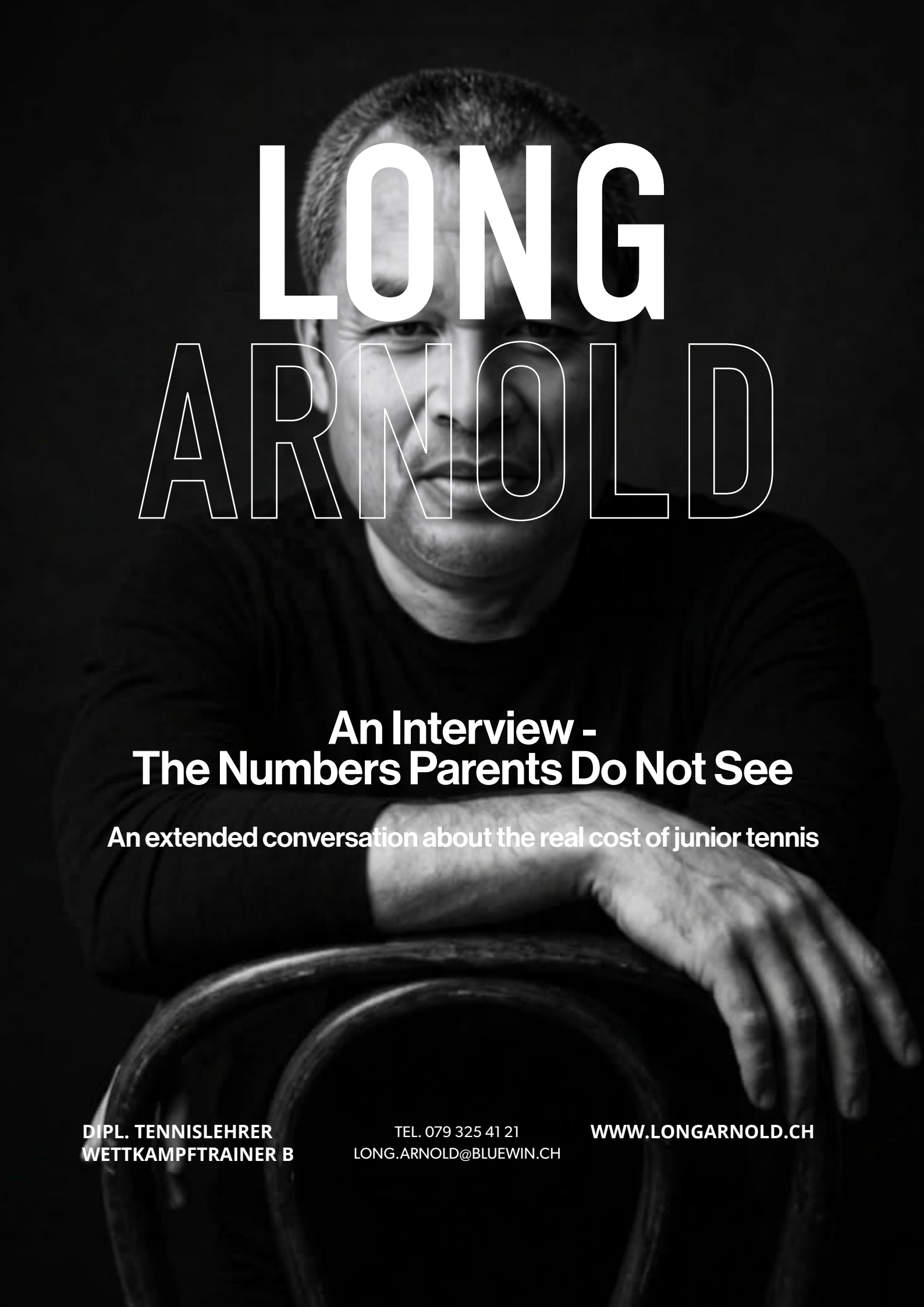


LONG ARNOLD

An Interview - The Numbers Parents Do Not See

An extended conversation about the real cost of junior tennis

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COSTS

An extended conversation about the real cost of junior tennis

Tennis is often presented as a straightforward investment: lessons, court time, equipment, tournament fees, travel, and perhaps an academy programme.

But behind every visible cost is another story.

There are the early mornings, long drives, weekends spent waiting beside courts, the tension before a match, and the silence after a difficult loss. There is the physical demand on a growing body, the pressure to improve, and the challenge of balancing ambition with school, friends, family life, recovery, and the simple freedom to be a child.

For some families, tennis becomes a lifelong source of joy, confidence, friendship, and resilience. For others, the journey can become too heavy—particularly when results, expectations, and financial investment begin to outweigh the player's emotional wellbeing.

In this conversation, Long Arnold draws on more than 35 years of coaching to look beyond the price of tennis. He speaks openly about the visible and invisible costs of junior development: time, pressure, disappointment, injury, academy pathways, emotional safety, and the responsibility adults carry when a child's passion becomes serious.

Long Arnold

The purpose is not to discourage ambition or protect young players from challenge. It is to help parents make informed, human decision so that tennis strengthens a child's life rather than quietly taking too much from it.



An Interview with Long Arnold
Tennis Coach, Mentor & Author

This interview helps parents understand the visible and invisible costs of junior tennis and how to support ambition without sacrificing their child's wellbeing, confidence, or love for the game.

Interview

Q: Parents often ask, "How much does tennis cost?" Is that the right question?

It is an understandable question, but it is not yet the complete one. The visible costs are easy to identify: coaching, court hire, rackets, strings, shoes, tournament fees, travel, hotels, food, fitness training, physiotherapy, and sometimes academy fees.

But tennis also costs time, energy, family weekends, emotional capacity, and—if the journey is not handled well—a part of a child's wellbeing.

The better question is: **What will this tennis journey ask of our child, our family, and our relationships over time?**

Tennis can give a child extraordinary things: movement, confidence, friendships, discipline, courage, problem-solving, and a lifelong passion. But it is a demanding sport. Families deserve an honest picture before they make large commitments.

The long road

Q: How long does it take for a beginner to become a strong tennis player?

Parents should think in long horizons. From the first steps on court to a genuinely advanced level, it often takes at least ten to twelve years of consistent development.

That does not mean ten to twelve years of constant pressure. It means a long process in which physical development, technique, coordination, tactical understanding, emotional maturity, confidence, and experience all have time to grow together.

Tennis is not a sport in which you simply learn a movement once and own it forever. A child grows. Their body changes. Their timing changes. Their strength changes. Their emotional world changes. Every new stage asks the player to adapt again. The danger begins when adults expect a ten-year journey to produce proof after one season.

Q: Why is patience so important?

Because tennis is complex. It asks a player to coordinate the whole body at speed, judge a moving ball, make decisions under pressure, regulate emotion, solve problems alone, and repeat this again and again.

A player can make visible progress in one area while struggling in another. Their technique may improve before their body is strong enough to support it. Their results may improve before they can manage the pressure that comes with winning. Their tactical understanding may be ahead of their emotional maturity.

Development does not move in a straight line. A child may look brilliant one month and lost the next. That is not necessarily a failure. It is often part of learning.

The weekly investment

Q: How much do serious junior players train?

Tournament players may spend roughly ten to twenty hours per week on tennis-related activity. That can include group training, individual lessons, match play, fitness, mobility, recovery, travel, tournaments, and personal practice.

But numbers alone do not tell us whether a programme is good. Ten hours can be too much for one child and appropriate for another. Twenty hours can be productive in one phase and harmful in another. The decisive question is whether the training load matches the child's age, body, school demands, emotional state, motivation, and ability to recover.

A child is not a professional athlete in a smaller body. They are a developing human being.

Q: What does recovery really mean?

Recovery is not laziness. It is part of training. A young player needs sleep, unstructured time, family life, friends outside tennis, school stability, food, rest, and days when they are not required to prove anything.

Recovery is also emotional. A child may physically be able to attend another session while emotionally exhausted from school pressure, friendship problems, a difficult tournament, or the feeling that they are constantly being evaluated.

The best programmes do not only ask, "Can this player do more?" They also ask, "What does this player need in order to remain well?"

The visible financial cost

Q: What are the main financial costs parents should expect?

The costs increase in layers. At the beginning, there may be lessons, court hire, a junior racket, shoes, and simple sports clothing. As a child becomes more committed, the costs can include regular group training, private coaching, fitness work, several rackets, restringing, tournament entry fees, travel, hotels, food, and sometimes physical therapy or recovery support.

At higher levels, the financial demands can become substantial. A professional player may spend thousands in a single month on travel, coaching, hotels, food, flights, and training. Even before a player earns meaningful prize money, someone must finance the journey.

That is why parents need clarity. Tennis can be a wonderful investment in a child's development. But it should never become a financial burden that the child feels responsible for repaying through results.

Q: Why is equipment more expensive than people expect?

Because equipment is not a one-time purchase. Shoes wear down. Strings lose tension and tear. Grips need changing. Rackets are replaced as children grow or improve. Serious players often carry more than one racket because a broken string or damaged frame cannot end a match.

These costs are manageable when they are planned. But they are another reminder that tennis is not simply an hour of coaching each week. It is an ongoing system of investment.

The time no invoice records

Q: What is the most underestimated cost in tennis?

Time.

A family may look at a tournament entry fee and see a small number. But the actual cost may be an entire weekend: the drive, the waiting, the warm-up, rain delays, meals, transport, perhaps a hotel room, the match itself, and the journey home.

A player can spend several hours preparing for a match that lasts forty minutes. They can travel across the country and lose in the first round. They can wait all day for a match that is postponed. Tennis requires a great deal of waiting. Waiting for draws. Waiting for court assignments. Waiting for weather. Waiting while a match goes long. Waiting for a child to emerge from a difficult loss. This is part of the sport. But it is also part of the family's investment.

Q: Is it difficult for parents to manage this?

It can be. Parents organise the schedule, drive, pay, wait, encourage, worry, and often quietly carry the practical load. The risk is that all this investment creates an expectation that the child must produce something in return. A good result. A win. Proof that the weekend was worthwhile.

But a child cannot carry the emotional weight of a parent's investment. If they feel they must justify every lesson, every journey, every hotel room, and every sacrificed weekend, tennis becomes much heavier than it needs to be.

The emotional cost of tournaments

Q: Why can tournaments be emotionally difficult for children?

Because a tournament is never only a match. A child may have trained for weeks. They may have pictured themselves winning. Their parents may have planned the weekend around it. There may be money, travel, time, hope, and family attention attached to one result.

Then the player loses. A young player may feel sad, angry, embarrassed, disappointed, or confused. They may feel that they wasted everyone's effort. They may fear that they have disappointed their coach or parents. The loss is painful enough. Shame makes it much worse.

Q: What does shame look like in a young player?

It does not always look like tears. A child may become silent in the car. They may say, "I don't know," when asked what happened. They may blame the opponent, the weather, the court, or the racket. They may become angry. They may want to leave immediately. They may say they never want to play again. Sometimes that is not bad behaviour. It is a child who does not yet have words for what they are feeling.

Underneath may be a very simple fear: **I was not good enough, and now the people I depend on are disappointed in me.**

Q: What should a parent do after a loss?

First, regulate yourself. A parent does not have to pretend the loss is pleasant. But the child needs to feel that the relationship is not threatened by the result.

The first question after a difficult match does not have to be tactical. It can simply be: "How are you feeling?" Or: "Would you like to talk, eat something, or just have a quiet moment?"

Some children want to analyse immediately. Others need space. The parent's task is not to force a lesson from the loss before the child has had time to feel it. A child who learns, "I can lose and still be loved, respected, and safe," develops a form of resilience that no technical lesson can replace.

Tennis and the mathematics of loss

Q: You often say that tennis teaches loss before it teaches winning. What do you mean?

In a knock-out tournament, half the players lose in the first round. Half of those remaining lose in the next round. This continues until the final, where one player wins and one player loses. Only one player wins the tournament.

Everyone else leaves with some version of disappointment. This cycle repeats from one tournament to the next, week by week, year by year. Even elite players lose far more tournaments than they win.

That is why a young player must learn to separate the experience of losing from the belief that they are a loser. A match result can be disappointing. It can reveal weaknesses. It can demand reflection and work. But it must not become a verdict on a child's worth.

Q: What is a healthy response to losing?

A healthy response includes honesty. We do not need to tell a child that losing does not matter. It matters to them. We should respect that. But we can help them understand that disappointment is survivable. A loss can hurt, and the player can still

belong. A poor match can be real, and the player can still be capable. A result can reveal something to improve without defining the person.

The goal is not to make children indifferent to winning. The goal is to help them care deeply without becoming emotionally destroyed by defeat.

The cost of pressure

Q: Is pressure always harmful?

No. Pressure is part of growth. A child learns through challenge: serving at 5-4, playing a stronger opponent, entering an unfamiliar tournament, recovering after mistakes, and facing the possibility of losing. The issue is not pressure itself. The issue is whether the child has support, recovery, perspective, and a relationship in which they can speak honestly about what the pressure feels like.

Resilience is not built by leaving a child alone with difficulty. **It is built through supported difficulty.**

Q: What happens when pressure becomes too much?

A child can begin to play only to avoid mistakes. They may become afraid of taking risks, trying new things, or disappointing important adults. Their tennis can become cautious, tense, and joyless.

Over time, some players become emotionally exhausted. They lose confidence. They feel trapped between their own hopes and the expectations around them. They may continue because they do not know how to stop, or because they fear hurting the people who have invested in them.

Burnout rarely arrives as one dramatic event. More often, the joy slowly disappears. The saddest outcome is when a young person puts the racket aside and never touches it again. What once gave them energy, friendship, pride, and passion becomes associated with pressure, loneliness, pain, or shame.

The physical cost

Q: What are the physical risks in tennis?

Tennis asks a growing body to perform demanding actions repeatedly: serving, rotating, accelerating, stopping, landing, lunging, and changing direction.

Without appropriate technique, sensible training loads, rest, sleep, nutrition, and communication, the body can become overloaded. Shoulder, elbow, wrist, back, knee, ankle, and hip problems can interrupt development.

But an injury is never only physical. A child who is injured may lose their place in a group, miss tournaments, feel left behind, or begin to question who they are without tennis. They may see others improving while they are asked to wait. That requires care. Rehabilitation should not only focus on getting the body back onto court. It should also protect confidence, belonging, and patience.

Q:. Can a child's ambition make injury worse?

Yes, especially when the child believes that speaking up will disappoint someone. A player may hide pain because they fear losing their place in a group, being seen as weak, missing a tournament, or frustrating their parents or coach.

That is why emotional safety matters so much. A child must be able to say, "Something hurts," "I am tired," or "I am overwhelmed," without fearing punishment, ridicule, or loss of approval.

The academy question

Q: Many families see an academy as the next step towards serious tennis. What should

they understand before making that decision?

They should understand both the opportunity and the structure.

An academy may offer courts, daily training, strong practice partners, organised competition, physical preparation, and a highly focused environment. For some players, this can be a meaningful experience. But parents should not confuse professional appearance with individual care.

Academies are also businesses. Many need a large number of players and families to remain financially viable. Fees can be significant—often in the range of €30,000 to €50,000 per year, sometimes more once travel, tournament coaching, individual sessions, equipment, and living costs are added.

Parents need to ask what their child will actually receive for that investment.

Q: What can happen inside a volume-based system?

A hierarchy can develop. The most promising junior may receive the head coach's personal attention, extra supervision, stronger training partners, recovery support, and additional resources. From a performance perspective, that is understandable. A visible success story attracts attention and helps sell the dream.

But the other players may be financing the same system while receiving less individual attention, less honesty, and less care. They may remain because they are told that the next breakthrough could be around the corner. When that breakthrough does not come, the explanation is often placed on the player: not talented enough, not committed enough, not mentally strong enough, unlucky, or simply not chosen by fate.

A more honest question is sometimes this: Did the environment ever truly have the capacity to see and develop this individual child?

Q: Is every academy harmful?

No. There are thoughtful academies and deeply committed coaches. The point is not to condemn every intensive programme. The point is to look beneath the branding, facilities, uniforms, and promise of opportunity.

Parents should ask:

- Who will know my child personally?
- Who notices when they are struggling?
- How are players treated when they lose?
- How are injuries handled?
- Is there enough individual feedback?
- Is the programme flexible when a child's needs change?
- What happens to the players who are not the academy's biggest prospects?
- Can my child speak openly without fear of losing status or attention?

A child is not a financial unit, a ranking, or a possible future success story. They are a person whose development deserves care whether they become the academy's star player or not.

The cost of growing up too quickly

Q: Can a demanding tennis pathway affect childhood itself?

It can, particularly when tennis takes up so much space that there is little room left for anything else.

A child may travel constantly, spend long periods away from family, train in adult environments, miss ordinary friendships, and learn to organise their life around performance from a very young age. Some young players move to academies far from home. This can be a positive and exciting step when it is chosen carefully and supported well. But it can also be emotionally demanding.

A child still needs family connection, belonging, play, rest, safety, and people with whom they do not have to perform.

Q: What does "missed childhood" mean in practice?

It does not only mean missing birthday parties or weekends with friends.

It can mean missing spontaneity. It can mean having no time to be bored, playful, ordinary, or free from evaluation. It can mean becoming highly responsible before the child is emotionally ready. It can mean being praised mainly for discipline, achievement, and sacrifice.

When this becomes the dominant message, a young person may begin to believe:

- I must perform to be valued.
- I should not need too much from others.
- I have to be strong all the time.
- I must be perfect to be safe.
- I should please adults rather than listen to myself.

Not every ambitious young player develops these patterns. And tennis alone does not create them. But an environment that overlooks emotional needs can reinforce perfectionism, people-pleasing, fear of failure, and difficulty asking for help.

The invisible scoreboard

Q: You use the expression "the invisible scoreboard." What is it?

Every player carries an invisible scoreboard alongside the official one. The official scoreboard tells us who won points, games, and sets. The invisible scoreboard asks different questions:

- Do I belong here?
- Am I valued when I struggle?
- Can I be honest about how I feel?
- Is it safe to make mistakes?
- Will I be treated with respect after a loss?
- Do I have to earn connection through performance?

These questions shape a player's willingness to learn. A child who feels emotionally safe can take risks, admit confusion, try new skills, receive feedback, and recover from failure. A child who feels constantly judged may become defensive, compliant, anxious, or afraid to show who they really are.

Q: Does emotional safety lower standards?

No. It makes high standards possible. A player who is not afraid of being diminished can look honestly at weakness. They can hear difficult feedback without experiencing it as rejection. They can take responsibility without collapsing into shame.

We do not train because something is wrong with the player. We train because there is more potential to discover. That is the difference between correction and discovery.

The role of the coach

Q: What should parents look for in a coach?

Of course parents will ask about qualifications, training times, group size, competition opportunities, and technical knowledge. Those things matter.

But there is a more fundamental question: **Does this coach create enough safety for my child to meet difficulty without feeling alone?**

- An emotionally secure coach can set firm standards without humiliation.
- They can challenge a player without attacking their dignity.
- They can notice when a child is overwhelmed.
- They can repair a misunderstanding.
- They can say, "That was difficult," without making the player feel defective.

A good coach does not need to be perfect. But they should be willing to listen, reflect, apologise when necessary, and remain curious about the person behind the performance.

Q: How does a secure coach build trust?

Through consistency.

- They arrive prepared.
- They communicate clearly.
- They follow through.
- They do not use fear as motivation.
- They do not withdraw care after poor performance.
- They treat mistakes as information.
- They make room for questions.
- They protect a child's dignity in front of others.

Over time, the player learns: I can struggle here and still belong. That is not a small thing. It is the foundation from which courage grows.

The role of parents

Q: What is the parent's role in all of this?

Parents do not need to become coaches, psychologists, or perfect emotional experts. Their most important role is to remain a secure base.

A child should not have to manage the parent's disappointment after a loss. They should not need to guess whether love, warmth, or connection will disappear when results are poor.

Parents can support the journey by staying curious rather than controlling. By asking questions instead of immediately giving answers. By noticing when the child is tired. By allowing room for change. By remembering that motivation rises and falls.

And by keeping one truth clear:
My child's value is not on the scoreboard.

Q: What is one question parents should ask themselves regularly?

I would ask: **Is tennis still adding something valuable to my child's life?**

Not only results. Not only ambition. Not only future possibilities. Is it adding joy, confidence, friendship, health, courage, and a sense of competence?

If the answer becomes consistently no, it is not a betrayal of tennis to pause, adjust, reduce the load, change the environment, or have an honest conversation. **It may be the most loving decision a parent can make.**

What success should really mean

Q: At the end of a junior tennis journey, how should success be measured?

Trophies, rankings, selections, and victories can be meaningful. They deserve to be enjoyed. But they are not the whole story.

A successful tennis journey is one in which a young person develops skill, resilience, self-respect, responsibility, and a lasting relationship with movement and the game.

It is one in which they learn that they can face difficulty without being alone.

- That mistakes do not remove their worth.
- That they can work hard without becoming a project.
- That they can compete fiercely and remain human.

The greatest outcome is not simply that a child becomes a good tennis player. **It is that they become a whole person who still loves to play.**

The Number That Matters Most

The most important number may not be a price, an hourly total, a ranking, or a win-loss record.

It may be the number of years a child remains connected to tennis with joy, self-respect, and the confidence to meet challenge.

A good tennis journey does not guarantee trophies. But it can give a young person something more durable: the ability to work hard without losing themselves, to face failure without shame, and to carry a lifelong love of the game.

The true cost of tennis is not only what a family spends. It is what the journey asks of everyone involved—and what it gives back.

Interview Highlights

This interview has one central message: junior tennis should develop a player's ability without making their worth dependent on performance.

Key Quotes

"The better question is: What will this tennis journey ask of our child, our family, and our relationships over time?"

"The danger begins when adults expect a ten-year journey to produce proof after one season."

"A child is not a professional athlete in a smaller body. They are a developing human being."

"A child cannot carry the emotional weight of a parent's investment."

"Does this coach create enough safety for my child to meet difficulty without feeling alone?"

"The most important number may be the number of years a child remains connected to tennis with joy, self-respect, and the confidence to meet challenge."

Interview Highlights

Core Principles

1. Tennis is a long human-development journey

Technical progress, physical growth, emotional maturity, confidence, and tactical understanding do not develop at the same speed. Parents and coaches must think in years, not in one tournament or one season.

2. The true cost of tennis is both visible and invisible

Families pay money, time, energy, travel, equipment, and organisation. But the invisible costs—pressure, disappointment, injury, loneliness, family strain, and lost joy—can be just as significant.

3. Losing is inevitable; shame is not

In a knock-out sport, almost everyone loses. The task is not to protect children from disappointment, but to ensure that a loss does not become a verdict on their worth, talent, or place in the family.

4. High standards require emotional safety

Pressure can help a child grow when they feel supported. When they feel alone, judged, or afraid of rejection, pressure can become anxiety, compliance, burnout, or avoidance.

5. Parents must examine the environment, not only the promise

Academies, squads, facilities, and competition pathways may look impressive. The deeper questions are: Who knows the child personally? Who notices struggle? Who protects their dignity?

6. Coaching is relational work

A good coach teaches technique, tactics, and movement. A great coach also creates trust, treats mistakes as information, protects dignity, and helps a player face difficulty without feeling alone.

7. The Invisible Scoreboard matters as much as the official one

Alongside the score, every child is asking: Do I belong? Am I valued when I struggle? Can I make mistakes? Is it safe to be honest?

The answers shape whether they learn with curiosity or defend themselves through fear.

8. The ultimate measure of success is a healthy relationship with tennis

Trophies, rankings, and selections matter, but they are not enough. A successful tennis journey leaves a young person with skill, resilience, self-respect, and a lasting love for the game.



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TENNIS IS MY SPORT

In my blog, I share my decades of experience working with players of all ages and skill levels. Here you will find articles on topics such as technique, mental strength, personal development, and the deeper values that tennis teaches us.

Tennis Experience

www.longarnold.ch/blog