

MATCH OF LIFE

The Tennis Parent's Guide

Part Two — What Makes a Great Coach?

Long Arnold

DIPL. TENNISLEHRER
WETTKAMPFTRAINER B

TEL. 079 325 41 21
LONG.ARNOLD@BLUEWIN.CH

WWW.LONGARNOLD.CH

Part Two
How Do You Recognize a Good Tennis Coach?

Chapter 2. An Important Decision

Choosing the right tennis coach can be one of the most consequential decisions parents make in their child's sporting development.

Most parents evaluate a tennis coach through visible qualifications. They look at certificates, playing experience, rankings, professional backgrounds and technical knowledge. Those qualifications matter. But they are only part of the picture.

A coach works with a developing human being. That requires much more than understanding tennis technique. I believe a good coach needs five fundamental competencies.

Competence	What parents should look for
1. Technical	Does the coach understand technique, tactics, movement and competitive tennis?
2. Educational	Can the coach explain, demonstrate, adapt and teach according to the child's developmental stage?
3. Psychological	Does the coach understand motivation, emotional regulation, confidence, pressure and learning through mistakes?
4. Relational	Can the coach build trust, communicate honestly, establish boundaries and resolve conflicts?
5. Leadership	Does the coach establish standards, take responsibility, demonstrate consistency and develop independence?

Parents should observe how the coach behaves when things become difficult.

A coach's true qualities are often most visible not when a child succeeds, but when a child struggles.

- Does the coach become impatient?
- Does the child become frightened of making mistakes?
- Does the coach explain or merely criticize?
- Does the coach recognize effort and improvement?
- Can the child ask questions?
- Does the coach treat less talented children with the same dignity as talented ones?
- How does the coach communicate with parents?
- Does the coach make promises about future results?

These moments reveal far more than a coach's technical knowledge. They reveal how the coach understands children, exercises authority and builds relationships.

I encourage parents to observe four things:

1. Observe the coach when things go wrong. Does the coach respond with frustration or curiosity? A good coach doesn't interpret every mistake as a failure of the child, but as an opportunity to better understand how the child learns.

2. Observe what happens to the child. Does the relationship help the child become more confident, curious and capable of taking responsibility for their own learning?

3. Observe how the coach handles authority. A good coach can establish boundaries, demand effort and hold children accountable without humiliating or diminishing them.

4. Does the child have a voice? Can the child ask questions, express concerns or respectfully disagree? A good coach encourages autonomy, self-awareness and the confidence to communicate one's needs.

A good coach doesn't simply teach children how to play tennis. They help children develop a healthier relationship with themselves.

High standards and unconditional human dignity are not opposites. They belong together.

Does my child feel that their coach values them just as much on a difficult day as on a successful one?

I encourage parents to observe how a coach responds when a child becomes vulnerable. When a child becomes vulnerable, coaches may respond in four very different ways.

1. The emotionally distant coach

This coach stays with technique, instructions and corrections. They stay on the surface and avoid emotional conversations.

2. The coach who needs to have all the answers

This coach may genuinely care about children but experience uncertainty as a threat to their competence. They quickly offer solutions, reassurance or explanations.

3. The coach who responds with control

This is perhaps the most concerning pattern. A child becomes overwhelmed, angry or tearful. The coach feels increasingly uncomfortable and responds by raising their voice, becoming more demanding or insisting on immediate obedience.

4. The emotionally available coach

This is the coach who can remain present without immediately fixing, withdrawing or controlling. They notice the child's frustration. They also notice their own reaction. They recognize that the child may need time, understanding, a different explanation, a boundary or simply a moment to recover. And they don't assume they already know which response is needed.

No coach responds perfectly in every situation. What matters is the willingness to recognize one's own reactions, reflect on them and take responsibility when necessary.

My Message to Parents

Why this matters beyond tennis.

Children don't learn only from what coaches explicitly teach. They also learn from how coaches respond to them.

- When a child makes a mistake and the coach remains respectful, the child experiences that failure doesn't necessarily threaten the relationship.
- When a child expresses frustration and the coach listens, the child experiences that difficult feelings can be communicated.
- When a child respectfully disagrees and the coach remains curious, the child experiences that having a voice doesn't automatically threaten belonging.
- And when a coach acknowledges their own mistake and apologizes, the child sees that authority and accountability can coexist.

These are meaningful experiences that can shape how children understand relationships.

I see tears, frustration, overwhelm and withdrawal on my tennis court. I don't see these reactions as problems to eliminate, but as opportunities to better understand the child behind the player.

My responsibility is not to have all the answers, but to remain curious, listen and help children understand themselves better. Because the greatest gift I can offer a child is not the ability to avoid difficult emotions, but the confidence to navigate them without losing themselves.

Long Arnold
Match of Life — Letters to Tennis Parents

To Parents
How does your child's coach respond when your child struggles? Hit reply and let me know—I read every email.

Coming in Part Three (December 15)
Why Emotional Safety Comes Before High Standards. Discover why emotional safety is the foundation for high standards, meaningful challenges and lasting growth.





My philosophy is simple:

“I don’t create emotional safety so that I can ask less of my players. I create emotional safety so that they become secure enough for me to ask more of them.”

Long Arnold