

Title: Competitive success in the performance development of tennis players

Abstract

This study deals with the performance development analysis of players, in the conditions of the Czech Tennis Association environment (before 1993 of the Czechoslovak Tennis Association), and the aim is to find if the competitive success of Czech, or Czechoslovak players reached in the U12 and U14 age categories relates to their later top performance achievements at the international level.

The prospective view analyses national rankings of best U12 and U14 players (during years 1989 – 2011) in relation to their future success at the professional level on the ATP and WTA Tour. The retrospective analysis focuses on players (born 1970 or younger) who reached a top 100 ATP or WTA ranking, and explores their performance development.

The qualitative part of the research, based on structured open ended interviews with tennis experts, identifies, confirms and/or reviews the ways of achieving the top tennis performance. This part focuses on three topics of the long-term athletic development in tennis – characteristic features of training, demands on successful players and importance of sport competitions.

The total number of 1791 players were involved into the prospective analysis research, and there was a success of 38,50 % of male and 52,21 % of female players to get into the ATP/WTA database. The results of the retrospective analysis show that 47 Czech tennis players (29 women and 18 men) achieved a top 100 ATP or WTA ranking during their career, the age range of their first evidence among top 100 players is 19,29 – 29,91 years (male ATP), and 15,69 – 27,73 years (female WTA). These players started their tennis career at the age of 6,06 years on average.

The results show that, for being among top 100 players of ATP and WTA Tour, it is important to have the ranking among top players already in the U12 and U14 age categories, but in fact the order of ranking does not have to play the crucial role. There is an influence of the previous training, the role of specialization or talent as well.

Keywords: tennis, sports performance, long-term athlete development, success, talent.