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Abstract.

This paper attempts to review the development of tennis in Malaysia and efforts made by its national governing body, Tennis Malaysia and to discuss on the development of tennis in Malaysia through the successful mode of tennis development strategy, and analyzes the successful mode of tennis development strategy in its planning and implementation. Tennis is competing with other sports in attracting the youth to take up the sport as one of their preferred leisure activities. Tennis Malaysia also engages in Junior Development activities to bring junior tennis players up the learning curve and be more competitive. Elite athlete development is the result of a combination of elite sport policies, athlete development pathways and interactions between various stakeholders that are involved in the delivery of athlete development pathways. These factors make elite athlete development a complex, multi-layered and multi-faceted field of study that necessitates specific research efforts that focus on how these factors contribute to elite athlete development in specific sports. Tennis Malaysia and its affiliates have endeavored to raise the standard of the sport in the past few years and have been relatively successful in achieving their objectives although there is much scope for improvement. The national body will continue to implement and improve its approach in developing tennis in Malaysia and will conduct some capacity building activities towards achieving excellence for tennis to continue to grow in all aspects.

Keywords. *tennis; transformation; athlete; development; strategy; Tennis Malaysia*

INTRODUCTION

Tennis is a distinctive sport that demands an integration of multiple factors. In Malaysia, the national sports organization that governs the sport of tennis is Lawn Tennis Association of Malaysia or better known as Tennis Malaysia. Tennis Malaysia is responsible for developing and promoting tennis nationwide and regulates tennis through 14 affiliated state tennis associations. This paper reviews on the development of tennis in Malaysia and to highlight the vision, philosophy and objectives of Tennis Malaysia as the national tennis governing body and how it was translated into programs and activities that are implemented throughout the country. The progress of these programs and activities are being monitored and improved upon review in order to ensure that the objectives will be achieved. The operating model under which the programs and activities are undertaken is targeted to deliver the results in the long run.

Operating Model

The national tennis association has a number of roles. These roles require the association to put in place necessary programs and activities that allow it to fulfill its obligations. National sports organizations develop high performance plans or athlete development pathways to assist in their strategic planning and the delivery of elite athlete development (Tennis Canada, 2013). These include strategies on the competition structure, high performance pathways, training requirements, financial support programs, and talent identification. However, not all of these roles are fully implemented as they require resources, the development of specific rules, regulations, programs and activities. The intention is to ensure that Tennis Malaysia is a fully functioning sports association that is capable to meet all of its obligations.

The Core Processes are Tennis Promotion, Junior Development, Tournaments and National Squad Development, describe the primary roles of the association and encapsulates all tasks and information relating to each process. The subsidiary processes are Training & Education, Media Communications, Governance and Finance, Accounting & Administration, provide shared services that support the Core Process.



Figure 1. Tennis Malaysia Operating Model.

Tennis Promotion

Tennis is competing with other sports in attracting the youth to take up the sport as one of their preferred leisure activities. Popularity of the sport depends on there being a constant stream of people of various age groups that experience the sport for the first time and are encouraged to play the game. Introducing the sport at an early age enables them to then learn the skills required to enjoy the game and to begin the journey to becoming a competitive player. Studies suggested that successful athlete development pathways require sports to attract, retain, transition and nurture athletes (Shilbury, Sotiriadou, & Green, 2008; Sotiriadou et al, 2008). In order to develop elite athletes, many National Sports Organizations identify talented athletes at a young age, and recruit them to participate at development programs (Unierzyski, 2006; Vaeyens, Lenoir, Williams, & Philippaerts, 2008). Tennis Promotion's primary objective is to introduce and market the sport of tennis to Malaysian youth throughout the country in order for them to consider tennis as one of the sports that they would like to be active in during their leisure time. By achieving this objective, Tennis Malaysia is expected to:

- a. expose and attract more young Malaysians to tennis thereby potentially increasing the number of tennis players in the country;
- b. introduce the game to young Malaysians so that they may follow the sport even if they choose not to be an active player; and
- c. promote a safe and healthy activity.

Strategic Plan and Implementation

The target group is young Malaysians between the ages of 7 and 10 years old thereby enabling the association to conduct mini tennis sessions in both indoor and outdoor settings. This mini-tennis program was branded as First Serve program and is a collaboration between Tennis Malaysia and Ministry of Education. In February 2017, the First Serve program was launched by the Minister of Education. Since then until 2019, the program was held at 14 states by introducing tennis to 997 teachers, 1848 students from 385 schools across the nation.

Table 1: Statistics of First Serve Promotion & Development Program

FIRST SERVE ROADSHOW PHASE 2017 TO 2019			
No. of Teachers	No. of Students	No. of Schools	No. of States
997	1848	385	14

The Ministry of Education was responsible for the choosing of the schools and the logistics of bringing the teachers and students to each session. Tennis Malaysia provided the certified coaches who would conduct training sessions for the teachers so they can continue to coach the students and conduct initial training for the students. The statistics have shown very encouraging results as stated in Table 1.

In 2020, Tennis Malaysia plans to continue the First Serve program and engage state associations more closely in order to follow up on the “Introduction to Tennis” session. Tennis Malaysia will be working with schools to tap the skills of the teachers who went through mini tennis coaching course to conduct more of the First Serve sessions. As more students start learning to play tennis, a small percentage is expected to be keen to learn more about tennis and develop their skills further.

Junior Development

Developing elite athletes is complex, multi-faceted and multi-layered (Andersen, Houlihan, & Ronglan, 2015). Having introduced young Malaysians to the sport, those who wish to take it up must have an avenue to learn to play the game better and become more competitive. The main role of talent development processes is to facilitate athlete transition from regional competitions to national and international competitions and from junior to senior level when athletes' skills improve (Green, 2005). In order to facilitate these athlete transitions, sports organizations should implement policies on talent identification, talent development programs, and competitions with the aim to guide the most talented athletes to the highest levels of sport (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009). As such, Tennis Malaysia engages in Junior Development activities to bring junior tennis players up the learning curve and be more competitive. This Junior Development program aims to develop young tennis players to become technically sound and competitive. This objective can be achieved by:

- a. providing beginner level coaching sessions on a regular basis;
- b. organising more competitions so as to be able to gauge the progress of each player; and
- c. selecting and preparing a squad of players to enter international level tournaments.

STRATEGIC PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Tennis Malaysia is actively encouraging its' state affiliates to work closely with the Ministry of Education's State Sports Officer in order to provide a channel by which students who express interest in tennis can get the necessary coaching to take them up the development curve. This collaboration between affiliate and the State Sports Officer can also allow the teachers who have been taught to conduct the First Serve tennis promotion session to continue to work with the students on their skills. Tennis Malaysia looks to conduct capacity building exercises to enable state associations to take up their responsibility and understand how to organize and conduct coaching sessions and produce reports for Tennis Malaysia on player progress. In order

to develop elite athletes, National Sports Organizations need to develop systems and processes that attract, retain and nurture athletes (Sotiriadou & De Bosscher, 2013). Clubs play a major role in the implementation of programs to attract, retain and nurture talented athletes (Brouwers, De Bosscher, & Sotiriadou, 2015a).

Tennis Malaysia will also encourage the organizing of state level tournaments such as the Monthly Medal in order to better understand the progress of players, the effectiveness of coaches and the early identification of talent. With the two activities in place, state affiliates are encouraged to select and send their players to national level tournaments. Participation in these tournaments will give valuable feedback to the coaches and the affiliates on the improvements that need to be made to raise the players' standard of play.

TOURNAMENTS

Tournaments are the primary means to gauge performance and progress. The competitive tennis player needs to constantly test his skills against opponents in order to learn of his strengths and weaknesses. The observant coach then develops drills and exercises to bolster the player's strengths and address his weaknesses. Recognizing this, Tennis Malaysia spends a considerable amount of its resources on organizing national and international level tournaments throughout the year.

The main objective of organizing tournaments is to provide players with the opportunity to pit their skills against their peers and develop themselves into better tennis players. Tennis Malaysia aims to:

- a. provide the opportunity to compete at national level in every age category;
- b. give the player the experience of life as a competitive athlete;
- c. gauge relative player performance through the ranking system to enable national squad selection; and

- d. provide opportunity for tennis officials to gain experience and develop their skills.

Strategic Plan and Implementation

Tennis Malaysia has been organizing the Tennis Malaysia Junior Tour since 2016, using the tried and tested format to organize the tournaments. The Junior Tour addressed the objectives of filling the age category gaps to enable players to move up a category without being overwhelmed by much older players and giving the players the experience of life on the road for tennis athletes. Tennis Malaysia is planning to increase the number of tournaments in the National Circuit as well as to hold them in different locations. Tennis Malaysia plans to increase the number of these tournaments at both ITF Juniors and ITF Pro Circuit levels. Apart from providing Malaysian players the opportunity to compete against foreign players, it also allows Tennis Malaysia to use the wild cards that come with organizing these tournaments to barter for wild cards in overseas tournaments.

From 2016 to 2019, Tennis Malaysia has organized the Junior Tour comprising of eight legs and a Masters tournament held in towns and cities across the country including Sabah. These tournaments attracted an average of 200 participants from various age groups. Almost all States sent players to these tournaments. The players' age ranged from 6 to 16 years old with an encouraging number of young players who entered the mini tennis 8 & Under category. Tennis Malaysia plans to hold six National Circuit events throughout the year culminating in the Masters held in Kuala Lumpur. In the past four years, the national body was able to complete all six events yearly with the average number of participants was 100 and approximately 10 states were represented. Four ITF Junior tournaments were held which attracted a full complement of participants in Sarawak, Melaka and Terengganu. In 2017, the fifth tournament was added in Kuala Lumpur and the sixth ITF Junior tournament was added in 2018 to make it a total of 6 tournaments.

In 2017, Tennis Malaysia has successfully held the inaugural Malaysian Men's ITF Futures series of three tournaments after many years of lapse. The first tournament was held in

Sarawak while the following two were held in Kuala Lumpur. Each tournament had a prize money of USD15,000 as well as ATP ranking points. 107 players from all over the world attended. Tennis Malaysia expects to hold the same number of events every year and in addition will bid to host the Junior Davis Cup and Junior Federation Cup Asia-Oceania event.

NATIONAL SQUAD DEVELOPMENT

As a member of the International Tennis Federation, Tennis Malaysia is obliged to send national teams to six events every year, namely, the Davis Cup, Federation Cup, Junior Davis Cup, Junior Federation Cup and World Junior Tennis Championship for Boys and Girls. In addition, Tennis Malaysia is also expected to field a team for multi-sport events such as the SEA Games. A long term planning will have to be designed in order to build and to maintain a squad of players who are the best in the country to compete in these tournaments.

The primary focus of National Squad Development is to achieve success in the team-based tournaments mentioned above. Tennis Malaysia therefore has to:

- a. select the best players for the national squad;
- b. provide them with the best high-performance coaching and training available; and
- c. enable them to compete for and accumulate world ranking points;

Strategic Plan & Implementation

Tennis Malaysia intents to build the strategy around the tournaments as ultimately competing in them is the true testing ground for each player's performance. The strategy, therefore, is to:

- a. produce individual player development plans that maps out the likely tournaments that each player should participate in throughout the year;
- b. select qualified and certified national coaches who are made responsible for individual player performance and whose performance is based on the players that they are in charge of;
- c. use evidence-based scientific approach to develop each player; and

- d. look for opportunities to expose players to international coaches and to help them develop themselves as a player.

2016 was the year for observation and planning before the transformation of National Squad Development. Players were sent to ITF tournaments overseas to gain experience and make the breakthrough into the main draw. Women players were particularly successful with a national woman's player has collected a significant number of WTA points. Women's team was also able to successfully defend their position in Group II Asia-Oceania of Federation Cup. In 2017, coaches were briefed on the strategy going forward and the implementation of the quarterly Player Progress Review. The association has strived to enter the junior players into at least 15 national and international tournaments throughout the year while for the senior squad players to enter into at least 20 tournaments.

Tennis Malaysia paid special attention to a top junior player who rose in world junior ranking throughout the year. Coaches were provided to train and to accompany him to various ITF Junior tournaments in Asia, Australasia and Europe. Tennis Malaysia has also worked on developing a crowd funding platform to raise funds for his mission to be the first Malaysian to play in the Junior Grand Slam after 22 years. At the end of the year of 2018, he was accepted by the Grand Slam Development Fund to be coached in Australia, participate in a warm up event and then participated in the Australia Open Junior Championships 2018.

Shared Processes

Tennis Malaysia Operating Model includes a number of processes that are shared across all core processes.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

With the increased activity that have been initiated, there is a pressing need to both increase the number of qualified and certified tennis coaches and officials around the country. Tennis experts must be purposefully selected to include individuals with high levels of expertise on elite sport policies and elite player development in tennis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Tennis Malaysia has followed the updated coaching curriculum when coaching courses are conducted. Currently there are 95 Level 1 coaches, 127 Level 2 coaches and 10 Level 3 coaches as shown in Table 2. Being coached by a certified and recognized coach gives the tennis players the assurance of a consistent and high degree of knowledge and experience.

Table 2: Total Certified Tennis Coaches in Malaysia

2016 to 2019 CERTIFIED COACHES		
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
95	127	10

Table 3 shows that there are 50 Green Badge officials, 4 White Badge and 1 Bronze Badge officials in Malaysia. Tennis Malaysia is keen to deploy them for tournaments throughout the year. However, officiating course was not able to be held in 2018 and 2019 due to lack of interest in this technical area but the organization will continue to train more technical officials so as to build a cadre of certified professionals in the country.

Table 3: Total Certified Tennis Officials in Malaysia

ITF OFFICIATING NATIONAL LEVEL SCHOOL COURSE		
Certified Green Badge	Certified White Badge	Certified Bronze Badge
50	4	1

Media Communications

Media exposure is also important to create commercial environment for tennis. The commercial environment includes the role of media, sponsors and the private sector. The role that media and sponsors can play for international tennis success is also confirmed in Andersen and Ronglan's (2012) and Wijk's (2012) findings who concluded that the exposure and promotion of tennis in the mass media and the existence of role models induced a wave of success in Swedish tennis in the 1980s. The example of Swedish tennis illustrates how the promotion and exposure of tennis in the media is closely linked to the popularity of tennis. Tennis Malaysia has made enormous strides to change the mindset of the local traditional media by issuing press releases, arranging press conferences and seeking to build a close relationship with the sports writers. Media coverage of local tournaments and the performance of national players in major tournaments and multi-sport events have increased significantly. Recent achievements of national tennis players have been reported positively by the local media.

GOVERNANCE

Tennis Malaysia is a member of the International Tennis Federation, the world governing body that regulates tennis globally. As the national governing body for tennis, Tennis Malaysia is responsible to ensure that the sport of tennis is held in high regard always and any issue is dealt with professionally, promptly and fairly. Tennis Malaysia is in the process of putting together its system of governance that is capable of dealing with all matters concerning tennis especially with all the stakeholders. Sport development stakeholders and the athlete development strategies initiated or implemented would enable the athlete's entrance or introduction to the sport, their retention or choice to continue to participate, and their advancement to higher levels of training and competitions (Green, 2005; Sotiriadou, 2013).

Finance, Accounting and Administration

Many national sporting organisations are financially dependent on government funding (Berrett & Slack, 2001; Green & Houlihan, 2006; Winand, Rihoux, Robinson, & Zintz, 2013) and tied in to performance based deliverables (Sam, 2012; Sotiriadou, Quick, & Shilbury, 2006). As a sports association, Tennis Malaysia must take due care in its sourcing and use of funds. Considering the reduced support from Government and the desire to increase the level of activity related to the sport, Tennis Malaysia is looking to diversify its sources of funds so as not to be too reliant on a single type of funding. Being a Not-for-Profit organization, the approach is to act as a social enterprise with the discipline and market orientation akin to business while ploughing any excess funds back into the sport.

Tennis Malaysia also intends to revamp the current accounting system so as to promote transparency, accuracy and timeliness. Activity-based accounting will be used to analyze the profitability of each activity that the association engages in. The annual budgeting process will also be transformed to coincide with the budgeting process of current and potential sponsors so that they may include our requests in their internal budget approval process.

CONCLUSION

Tennis Malaysia and its affiliates have endeavored to raise the standard of the sport in the past few years and have been relatively successful in achieving their objectives although there is much scope for improvement. For sport development stakeholders to successfully deliver elite athlete development outcomes, including success at national and international sporting events, a strategic approach to elite athlete development is necessary (De Bosscher, De Knop & van Bottenburg, 2009). The national body will continue to implement and improve its approach in developing tennis in Malaysia.

There is a need to conduct some capacity building activities towards achieving excellence for tennis to continue to grow in all aspects that have been presented. Tennis Malaysia must ensure that all relevant authorities are satisfied with its progress and continue to assist Tennis Malaysia in achieving its goals. With strong supports from all stakeholders, Tennis Malaysia should be able to put the sport back on the global tennis map.

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