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## TENNIS COMPETITION'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

### CONTRIBUIÇÕES DA COMPETIÇÃO DE TÊNIS NA EDUCAÇÃO E FORMAÇÃO DE CRIANÇAS

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#### RESUMO

Este estudo trata da competição de tênis infantil e sua relação com a educação e formação de crianças. O estudo se justifica pelo fato do tênis ser um esporte que culturalmente valoriza aspectos morais e éticos e por ter recentemente alterado suas regras para competições infantis. O objetivo geral do estudo é descrever e explorar o atual modelo competitivo de tênis das categorias até 10 anos quanto aos seus aspectos educativos e de formação pessoal, segundo a opinião de especialistas. Foram entrevistados onze treinadores de tênis com experiência na área e os resultados indicaram uma importante evolução com relação ao modelo competitivo anterior. No entanto, algumas adequações ainda parecem necessárias. As principais seriam: novas modalidades competitivas, tornando o esporte mais inclusivo e educativo; maior valorização do empenho, conseqüentemente menor foco no resultado; e maior número de participações competitivas, podendo-se alterar formatos competitivos e calendário.

**Palavras-chave:** Tênis. Esporte. Educação.

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#### ABSTRACT

This study addresses the Tennis 10's competition and its relation to children's education and personal development. The study justifies itself as tennis is a sport that values moral and ethical aspects and changed recently its rules in children competitions. The aim of this study is to describe and explore the current child tennis competition model in its educational and personal developmental aspects, according to specialists' opinions. Eleven coaches with expertise in the area were interviewed and the results showed an important evolution with the new model compared to the previous. However some adjustments still seem necessary. The main ones would be: new competitive modalities, turning the sport more inclusive and educational; greater value to effort, consequently minor focus in results; and higher number of competitive participations, being able to alter competitive formats and calendar.

**Keywords:** Tennis. Sport. Education.

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#### Introduction

Tennis is a sport with approximately 140 years of history. It originated in England in the 1870s, became an Olympic sport and is currently one of the most popular sports in Brazil, with approximately 1.5 million players<sup>1,2</sup>. Tennis has been increasingly studied in Brazil and there is already a number of important publications in some areas, such as sports psychology<sup>3-5</sup>, technical and tactical development<sup>6-8</sup> and sports training<sup>9-11</sup>. However, the pedagogy of the sport focusing on tennis still lacks further studies.

Some authors suggest<sup>12-15</sup> that the pedagogy of the sport should not be limited to teaching the movements, as aspects related to technique and tactics. According to these authors, educational aspects, such as inclusion, ethical and moral are just as important as those previously presented and should be part of the sport management and teaching.

Sports competition, in turn, is the essence of the phenomenon in sport<sup>6-18</sup>. However, its specific pedagogical aspects are little explored. Therefore, the present study deals with children's tennis competition from a perspective of education and the individual formation of children up to 10 years old, from the competitive model adopted by the Brazilian Tennis

Confederation (Portuguese Confederação Brasileira de Tennis or CBT). Our choice is justified, first, because tennis is a sport that, culturally, promotes ethical and moral values, prizing the respect for the opponent and the sport itself. Moreover, the recent rule changes on tennis competitions of the categories 10-and-under<sup>19</sup> justify a higher pedagogical attention. Finally, it can be said that the phenomenon of institutionalized children's competition is recent, compared to the sport phenomenon, and has been gradually gaining ground in the global sports scene<sup>20</sup>.

Sports competition has several meanings and functions<sup>21</sup>. It is noteworthy here its educational and formative function. In this sense, Marques<sup>17</sup> proposed a model of children's education and personal development through sports competition, establishing three key aspects in these competitions format: a) competition events according to the child's abilities, interests and needs; b) number and frequency of appropriate competitive interests; c) having the competition as a structuring element of all sports training.

The first category is justified, at first, by several authors on motor development<sup>22-24</sup>. According to these and other authors, children in this age group have unique characteristics: physical, such as height gains ranging from 5.0 to 7.5 centimeters per year<sup>22,23</sup>; motor, such as surprising improvements in fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination<sup>24</sup>; and psychosocial, such as the development of self-concept and the notion of competence<sup>23</sup>. In the same context, there is consensus in Physical Education that the child is not a miniature adult; therefore, children's competitions should not copy the adult competitive models<sup>17,25-27</sup>.

Given these characteristics, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) created a competition model in which it established new dimensions of courts and nets, pressure and speed of the balls, and also suggested matches with shorter durations and new dispute formats (see Table 1). This type of adaptation, according to Marques<sup>17</sup>, is necessary so that any child is able to compete.

Category	Ball	Court	Net height**
8 years old	Foam or felt (75%*)	11 x 5,5 m	80 cm
9 years old	Felt (50%*)	18 x 6,5 m	80 cm
10 years old	Felt (25%*)	Official court	91 cm

\* Slower, compared to the official ball; \*\* At the centre.

**Figure 1.** Materials e dimensions set by the ITF<sup>19</sup> for children's tennis competitions.

Source: Authors.

These adjustments in children's tennis have been discussed in recent years<sup>26-33</sup>. Most of them present teaching and competition models suggested by different associations. The studies looking into the number of adjustments in competitive regulations on children's and teenagers tennis<sup>26,27</sup>, in general, concluded that the identified adjustments were insufficient for the needs of its intended audience. Klering<sup>33</sup> even questions the influence of competitive models on training and technical-tactical training of teenager tennis players.

We can say that the number and frequency of completion participations is a topic that is far from a consensus. While some authors<sup>34,35</sup> claim that to the 10-under age range little or no competition is recommended, others<sup>17,25,36</sup> claim that it is precisely at this stage that competitions should become more frequent.

The first support the claim that the child is not technically prepared to compete and that competing in these conditions may lead to trauma. Meanwhile, those who advocate children's competition claim that by providing a high number of competitive experiences, children would have more opportunities to experience both victories and defeats. The ITF and

CBT suggest competitions formats that provide a higher number of matches, refuting the simple knockout format, which ruled in tennis. Barrell<sup>28</sup> points that as an alternative to avoid early withdrawal caused by losses. By playing more, the child tends to learn more and stay more motivated because the sport makes sense to them<sup>17</sup>. Wins and losses are directly related to the third category suggested by Marques<sup>17</sup> as it is from these experiences the children's sports education should be based upon.

According to Lima<sup>16</sup> sports competition is the most important pedagogical tool in a child's education. Deconstructing the relationship between wins and losses would reduce sport to something meaningless that would alienate its real meaning, especially for the child<sup>17</sup>. However, the mere participation of children in sport is not in itself good or bad. The quality of this participation – if it is meaningful to the child and based on pedagogical concepts – will determine whether the effects are beneficial or harmful<sup>37</sup>. Both victory and defeat have educational significance and, if viewed correctly, by both the coach and the athlete, can become positive life experiences<sup>38, 39</sup>.

In order to strengthen the educational power of competition, it would be necessary to make the defeats less dramatic and relativize the victories<sup>17,40</sup>.

Based on this information, we set the central and specific objectives of this study. The main objective was to verify if tennis competition of the categories 10-and under meet the goals on children education and personal development. In turn, the specific objectives were:

- Verify if tennis competitions of the 10-and under categories are appropriate to the children's abilities (physical, motor and cognitive), needs (psychological and social) and interests in this age group;
- Check if the number and frequency of participation in tennis competitions in the 10-and-under categories are adequate as proposed by Marques<sup>17</sup>;
- Verify if the wins and losses resulting from tennis competitions in the 10-and-under category present educational potential.

It should be noted that all the goals were set to be met from the opinion of experienced coaches, who are recognized by the community as references in training young tennis players.

## Methods

This study is based on the assumptions of qualitative methodology, whose way of investigating employs "investigative techniques centered on hermeneutic procedures that describe and interpret the representations and meanings that a social group gives to their everyday experience."<sup>41</sup> Thus, this study used information obtained through semi-structured interviews with experts<sup>42</sup> - tennis coaches in the 10-and-under categories. This type of interview allows the interviewee certain freedom to express their ideas and knowledge and, at the same time, makes the interviewer an important part in the process.

### Respondents

It is important to mention that we did not define the number of respondents *a priori*. Therefore, we carried out interviews until there were a saturation of information, which was identified from symbolic and practical standards, classification systems, categories of analysis of reality and repetitions<sup>43</sup>. Theoretical saturation of information took place with 11 interviewed coaches. The coaches participating in the study did not necessarily had a degree in Physical Education (8 physical education teachers, two former athletes, one former amateur football player/ball boy) because, culturally, many tennis teachers are former players or authorized professional<sup>44,45</sup>. However, we required more than five years of experience in the specified area, the period in which the professional reaches career stability<sup>46</sup>. Coaches had

17.81 years of experience in the field, even surpassing Ericsson<sup>47</sup> suggestion to identify an expert. The length of professional experience is particularly relevant in this study when taking in consideration the practical experience of the transition between the old and the current competitive models.

#### *The interview script*

The interview consisted of 10 items, carefully formulated based on the categories proposed by Marques<sup>17</sup>. It should be noted that we carried out a pilot interview in order to further adapt the questions according to the respondents' knowledge. This process is essential for the proper conduct of subsequent interviews.

#### *Interview and ethical procedures*

When we identified a potential participant, we made the initial contact by phone. Once they showed interest in participating in the study, we would schedule meeting. At this time, the Informed Consent Form was signed, authorizing the use of information for scientific purposes.

We conducted the interviews individually, always by the same interviewer in a local of preference chosen by the respondent. Interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder so that important data was not lost. After recording the interviews, transcripts and analysis of oral contents were performed. Once we finished the transcription, these were sent to respondents. Thus, they were able to evaluate the content transcribed, refuting it, approving it or approving it with corrections. As previously agreed, the criteria for confidentiality and privacy were respected, keeping their identities undisclosed and using only information the coaches agreed to reveal.

Ethical issues inherent in research with human beings as provided for in the Ministry of Health Resolution No. 466/2012 were observed. It is worth mentioning that this study is part of an umbrella project entitled "Models of sports competitions for children and youth: a descriptive exploratory study" and that it was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Rio Grande of South under the protocol number 271526.

#### *Analysis of the interviews*

The interviews content analysis was carried out from an essentially qualitative methodology, following a set of techniques suggested by Bardin<sup>48</sup>. The analysis was made initially focusing on the preparation of the research objectives, their assumptions, guiding questions, and finally, the selection of material to be analyzed - the interviews. At this time we formulated and established the categories of analysis (categorizing *a priori*) - categories established by Marques<sup>17</sup>. However, it opened up the possibility for the emergence of new categories according to the responses given by experts (categorizing *a posteriori*).

Throughout the process, we carried out a study of the materials obtained, in which we coded and classified interview excerpts in predefined categories. Also, according to Bardin<sup>48</sup>, subcategories were established for better interpretation. Finally, the codes went through a frequency analysis of their occurrence in the course of interviews to establish categories and/or subcategories *a posteriori*. The selected excerpts transcripts (and herein) were chosen according to their representativeness for the group of respondents.

### **Presentation and discussion of results**

First, the coaches were asked about their conception of the importance of children's sports competitions. Everyone was in favor of this kind of competition, justifying it especially

by the following reasons: socialization, learning in general, development of values such as honesty and respect, among others. This conception and justifications are in agreement with several authors<sup>16,17,25,37</sup> and are fundamental to the continuation of the study.

The categorization of answers, performed through content analysis, enables the creation of an explanatory table that, in turn, presents the categories established *a priori* (with their respective subcategories) and the subcategories originated from the respondents answers (established *a posteriori*) – with their respective frequency of occurrence (Table 1). The results and their discussions will be presented in accordance with the table, giving priority to the categories with the highest frequency.

**Table 1.** Categories of interview analysis

Categories <i>a priori</i>	Subcategories*	Subcategories <i>a posteriori</i> (ocurrences)	
Competition adjustments	Materials and dimensions	Competitive modalities (11)	8-and-under (10)
	Competitive categories		9 years old (10)
	Competition format		10 years old (10)
Number and frequency of participations	Official	-	
	Non official		
Sport Formation	Victories and losses	Knowing how to win/lose (8)	
		Conduct and discipline (6)	
		Values (5)	
		Social (5)	

\*answered by all interviewees.

Source: The authors

### *The adjustments on children's tennis competitions*

#### *Materials and court dimensions*

The tennis teaching methods had already been adapted to the capabilities and needs of children for some time<sup>32</sup>. However, competitions did not follow this trend. Therefore, changing the competitive model, in 2012, came to support a proposal that, for many, was already being implemented.

For those who were already working with the kids in this adapted way, it was a relief, because, until then, it seemed we were doing something absurd [...]. The problem was that our student learned with us this way, but could not play elsewhere, because almost everyone used the adult model, without any adaptation. We suffered a lot of criticism for it (Respondent 4).

Overall, the respondents reported there was an important collaboration of competitions in the technique improvement with suitable materials. However, they observed the difficulty some children had to adapt mainly to the rules of the 10-year-old category. This was the competitive category with the highest number of suggested changes. Changes were suggested specially regarding the court dimensions, justified by the child's inability to cover their size, perform net approach shot, and their difficulty of developing their service as an offensive blow. These results are in line with Tennant<sup>31</sup>, who states that the difference in the court size of the category "9-year-old" to the "10-year-old" is very large and ends up making "virtually impossible to carry out some important plays in tennis"<sup>31</sup>. This type of observation by the coaches allows us to suggest that deficiencies in the development of gaming combinations in categories 11-year-old, observed by Klering<sup>33</sup>, may be the result from a previous development deficit.

Most coaches pointed out that, for the model to be truly inclusive, in the sense of all children being able to participate in competitions, they should go through all the stages – “8-and-under” category, “9-year-old” and finally reaching the “10-year-old” category. However, what should be done with those who begin “late” in these competitive categories?

### *Competitive categories*

When questioned regarding the competitive categories, the coaches initially said they agreed with them. They justified their acceptance of the competitive categories divided year to year based in authors’ on human development<sup>22-24</sup>. Indeed, according to these authors, children under 10 years of age have a physical and motor development that differs significantly each year, making it impossible to establish more comprehensive competitive categories.

Also based on the classical authors<sup>22-24</sup> on human development, mixed competitions between boys and girls in these categories could be suggested. The authors emphasize that their maturational developments do not differ significantly at this age. Moreover, according Moely, Skarin and Weil<sup>49</sup>, competitiveness in girls is more stimulated when confronting opponents of the opposite sex. Therefore, another reason favorable to this idea.

In order to answer the question raised at the end of last topic, the Respondents 2 and 10 suggested the creation of competitive categories according to the technical level.

The right thing would be, for those children who do not have a good maturation of motor skills, to work with the ball that they can, and then move forward. Do not skip steps. [...] So, I think that this could really be changed. We should have category A, B, C, in order to make the most homogeneous possible (Respondent 2).

This suggestion corroborates Tennant<sup>29</sup>, who recommends offering and holding regular tennis competitions for all skill levels.

According Platonov<sup>50</sup>, only those individuals who are able to meet the technical, physical and tactical requirements of the competition should participate in it. Overall, the respondents agree with this suggestion. However, respondent 9 suggests, when a child does not fit in, the establishment of “performance goals” as he calls it, or “performance goals” as Silva<sup>51</sup>. In this case, the main objective would not be to win, but rather to obtain an output and an improvement within their reality, rewarding progress and effort<sup>29</sup>. This proposal is in line with the Motivational for Mastery Context<sup>52</sup>, which is based on self-assessment, encouraging autonomy in decision-making by the students. In this proposal, there is a great appreciation of the efforts of each individual, especially when they seek to achieve their best individual performance<sup>52</sup>. This view is in line with what Paes and Balbino<sup>15</sup> prioritize in an educational and non-reductionist sport.

Although agreeing with the competitive categories proposed for the children's tennis competitions, Interviewees 4, 10 and 11 also suggested the creation of an earlier “8-and-under” category. This proposal would partially fit into the what is now known as Baby Tennis, widespread in some countries as in France<sup>53</sup>, and being proposed by the Belgian Tennis Federation<sup>30</sup>.

### *The competition formats*

According Barrell<sup>28</sup>, one of the key factors in structuring the tennis competition is the format of the competition. The competition format can determine, for example, how many times a child will play and hence how many opportunities they will have to win or lose and how significant will this experience be. With this in view, we asked the respondents about

their opinion on the competition formats proposed by the current model of children's tennis competition and what is being done in the competitions their students take part.

The respondents were, in general, in favor of the formats used in official competitions, although some of these did not strictly comply to ITF and CBT. In the category "8-and-under" the Round Robin format (all against all) seems to be the most appropriate, providing opportunities for a large number of matches to all competitors. In the "9 years old" and "10," the competition format consists of a first stage of groups, a Round Robin, in which the best of the group would go on. From there, they compete in qualifiers until there is a winner. Only respondents 3 and 06 believe that the ideal format should be the Round Robin throughout the competition.

In a way, respondents said that the competitions meet the interests and needs of these children, agreeing with the reference authors in sport pedagogy<sup>16,17,25</sup> and specific to tennis<sup>28,29</sup>, abolishing the knock-out model and giving the children opportunities for richer experiences.

The decision to decrease the tennis eliminatory character has been proposed by the ITF for some time. Today, CBT recommends competitions to give opportunities to more games for all participants. It also suggests formats as "Consolation Key", making a parallel tournament with those who lost in the first round, and a *Feed-In*, which provides equal number of matches for all participants<sup>54</sup>.

The competition format interferes significantly in the richness and significance of competition for the child<sup>28</sup>, therefore, they have a strong relationship to the next category, originated from the interviewees, specific to tennis competition and relatable to the adaptations of children's competitions: the competitive modes.

### *Competitive modes*

The modalities of competition in the children's tennis is a topic little studied in the literature and it became a category derived from the interviewees' answers in our study. All coaches were very conducive to the realization of competitions in pairs and in teams, highlighting the interaction with other children, cooperation, division of responsibilities, including technical development as positive factors of these games.

It would be a good way to start, to share some of the pressure, the responsibility of the competition for the younger children [...]. Cooperative work, teamwork, harmony with the opposite sex ... the mixed doubles is very rich in these experiences and very interesting. I think it should be a practice to be used (Respondent 3).

The coaches' opinion corroborates the literature, which states that the game is a powerful socializing force in this age group. It is considered important to the development of skills such as problem solving, creativity, language and movements in general. Playing is crucial for learning the rules of society and of many fundamental skills for operating in society<sup>55</sup>. According to these authors, by participating in teams, children learn how to work with the objective of achieving the goals of the group or team, while also being subjected to their personal goals – which is a major breakthrough in the development for those who may still be trying to overcome their egocentrism<sup>55</sup>.

The "8-and-under" category uses the team competition format. However, some respondents stressed the wish that this practice was taken to the "9 years old" and "10 years old" competitions. They argue that, besides contributing to the children's personal development, the team practice and the variation of activities may contribute to the development of aspects that would not be prioritized in the simples' games. These aspects are

highlighted both by the respondents and by the literature<sup>29,51</sup>. Several authors emphasize the importance of varying *stimuli* and experiences in the children's cognitive, motor and psychosocial development<sup>55-57</sup>.

Marques<sup>17</sup> stresses the importance of thinking the competition according to the children's needs and interests. In this case, tennis, by providing opportunities for experiences beyond the individual sport, seems to be an alternative. In order to construct suitable models, the author suggests the possible deconstruction of what already exists, even if it somehow, can disfigure the sport. In this sense, Silva<sup>51</sup> and Marchon<sup>58</sup> propose competitions that would mix activities related to tennis with other collective games, coordinative and relay, agreeing with the proposal of game competitions suggested by respondent 5.

I find very interesting the team format, yet I have only seen this format in the "8-and-under." I think it would be very interesting a sort of contest format, in which they would have more team spirit, to cheer one another (Respondent 5).

As the child reaches adolescence, the influence of the family, usually begins to fade away and the peer group becomes an increasingly important social force<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, Silva<sup>51</sup> highlights that proposal of tennis as a more collective sport may be positive for a greater adherence to the practice and influence the permanence of these children, contributing to the sport expansion.

#### *Number and frequency of competitive participations*

The number and frequency of competitive participation for children is a topic that generates much discussion. Authors, in general, have different opinions regarding the recommended number of children's participation in sports competitions<sup>17,25,26,35</sup>. It is no different in tennis<sup>34,35</sup>. When we asked the coaches, their responses varied considerably. However, the majority of respondents (2, 3, 4, 6, 9 and 11) is in favor to a greater number of official competitive participations (from 6 to "the more the better"). Only Interviewees 1, 5 and 10, for analysis purposes, considered relatively low numbers appropriate for official competitions according per year (from 3 to 6). The Interviewee 7 could not specify a number of competitive participation he considered appropriate.

According Marques<sup>17</sup>, the more competitive experiences the children have, the better their understanding of the meaning of the competition, which was just what interviewee 2 said, supported by the findings of Interviewees 4 and 9. In addition, eight respondents said they hold or plan to hold internal tournaments (with official rules) to complement what would be, in their views, an ideal number of competitive participations. Two other respondents also suggested carrying out "exchanges" between clubs and tennis schools to provide differentiated experiences to their students, in which they would know meet people and know new places, besides playing against different opponents.

Nine of the respondents said they use competitive activities in all their classes, corroborating Marques<sup>17</sup>, which not only refers to official competitions, but also for simplified, diversified competitive activities, including training sessions. This idea is in line with some tennis teaching proposals, which have tried to bring training sessions closer to competition. Even the *Play and Stay* (the base of children's tennis competitions) emphasizes the importance of playing, consequently, of the competition, in tennis education<sup>59</sup>.

The number and frequency in these competitive events by the children has a strong relationship with the influence on the issue of wins and losses. The more competitive experiences and opportunities to experience victories and defeats the child has, the higher the educational potential of competitions. The educational potential of the relationship win/lose is



highlighted by Marques<sup>17</sup> as essential to have competition as an organizer in the child's sports training. Coaches often addressed this topic during interviews.

### *The wins and losses in education and child education*

Respondents suggest that competition provides pedagogically rich experiences, encompassing issues related to conduct and discipline, values and social aspects. However, the most common code in the analysis of the interviews was just "knowing how to win and lose," this being a fundamental element in the children's education process (see Table 1), supporting Marques<sup>17</sup> idea.

[...] Specially by the factor of learning to lose and learning to win – because there are children who do not know how to win. [...] In this format, we are able to make the child who was defeated, absorb it [...]. I try to teach them this: "Is victory important? OF COURSE! But first, you have to learn to lose, you have to learn to respect your opponent, you have to learn to be ethical, you have to learn to play tennis in an honest manner." This comes first (Respondent 8).

According Marques<sup>17</sup>, it is coach's role to demystify the ratio victory/defeat, making sure that these experiences are meaningful to the child. As a matter of fact, for the author, it is possible to learn much more from a defeat than from a victory. For this reason, Paccagnella<sup>39</sup> suggests that the coach should emphasize the competitive effort. After all, if you have done all that was in your power, no one can say that is not a successful competitor<sup>39</sup>.

It is implicit in a competition a previous agreement, in which both parties will seek victory. Without this premise, the competition is compromised or it can be said that there is no competition. According Hyland<sup>60</sup>, *Competitio* means "to strive together." In this condition, each participant must achieve a level of excellence that could not be achieved without a mutual effort - without competition<sup>60</sup>. In this sense, Marques<sup>17</sup> says that the competition has only its real educational value when the child plays seeking victory or giving their best. There is even an item entitled "Best Effort" in the Code of Conduct provided by CBT, which states "players must use their best efforts to win a match when competing<sup>54</sup>". This item totally agrees with the literal meaning of the word "competition" and with Shields and Bredemeier<sup>61,62</sup> definition of good and bad competitor, being good competitor the one who seeks to learn from the dispute and have the skill, or seeks to achieve his best, as his main goal.

However, "giving their best" does not mean "seek victory at any cost" nor having victory as the only goal in the competition. When victory is your only objective, there is a sense of imminent frustration. That is why some authors suggest less emphasis to be given on vitória<sup>38,40,63,64</sup>. As stated above, the objectives of children competition may be related to the achievement of personal goals, fun, learning and education. To do so, the good competitor should strive to the fullest.

However, the formation process based on the wins/losses ratio does not pass only through the teacher, but also by the system, or by the bodies governing the sport. In this case, the overvaluation of the results can directly influence the child's education. Respondents who addressed the issue said:

Unfortunately, everything focus on the competitive side. They have even a made a "ranking" in the 10-and-under (category) [...] It was not ideal, no. [...] In many pressure moments, we lose the child's creative capacity due to this pressure, the inclusion of a "ranking", of points [...] (Respondent 9).

The creation of rankings is neither recommended by the ITF nor specified by the CBT. Tennant<sup>31</sup> says that performance is more important than results in this stage, corroborating the statements of some respondents.

Finally, another point considered important by the respondents, and related to the issue of wins and losses, are the misconduct due to the results. Tennis, from its origin, is praised for being a sport that emphasizes loyalty and respect. These values are embedded in the sport culture so that, regardless of the country's culture or of the individual's, tennis culture overrides it. The strict respect to the rules and to the opponent, as well as loyalty, are part of a code of conduct implicit on the culture of tennis competitions.

### **Final considerations**

Although children's tennis competitions were developed taking into consideration the children of this age group, some adjustments still seem to be necessary, in the coaches' opinion. Some of them are: small adjustments of the court spaces, so that more children are able to play, making tennis a more inclusive sport. However, why restrict the adequacy of child sport to simply smaller versions of an adult sport? "The child is not a miniature adult, and their mentality differs qualitatively and quantitatively from adults; so that the child is not only smaller than adults, but different from them"<sup>65</sup>. Therefore, in addition to structural adjustments, other adjustments were suggested by the coaches.

The need for a greater number of competitive participations, whether in the same event, or on the calendar of official events, was pointed out by the coaches. The "knowing how to win" and "knowing how to lose" seem to be important in the process of children's education and personal development, according to these coaches. Thus, the overvaluation of results, from the creation of rankings, for example, seems inadequate and needs to be reassessed. Greater attention to the effort/accomplishment ratio could be more appropriate in the eyes of a non-reductionist pedagogy.

It may be suggested that the main contribution of this study of interviews with experts coaches, is the proposal of different forms of competition: doubles competitions and team competitions for all child categories. This could be the greatest contribution in the pedagogical sense for the tennis competition, because, from new competitive models, it would be possible to contemplate aspects to be improved and that were mentioned in other parts of the interviews. With team competitions, there will be a larger number of participations in the same competitive event, for example. Similarly, doubles competition may provide a better use of the spaces in the court, especially in the "10 years old" category. Also, if children's tennis is rethought as a more collective sport, this new competition can add much in the matter of wins and losses. The sport essence can be maintained, the moral and ethical aspects can be addressed, the children will be protected in their psychosocial characteristics and, finally, the sport becomes more inclusive, providing opportunities for all to participate and, in some way, having chances of winning, regardless of their technical level.

Few are the studies on children's competitions, let alone specifically on children's tennis competition – a national and international reality. This study was limited to analyze this phenomenon under the view of children's education and personal development from a single theoretical model for such purpose<sup>17</sup>. We would also mention the need for further studies to develop specific children's competitive models for tennis and other sports – given the numerous unique features that permeate every practice and their environment – always taking into account the objectives it proposes.

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