



FÉDÉRATION FRANÇAISE DE TENNIS

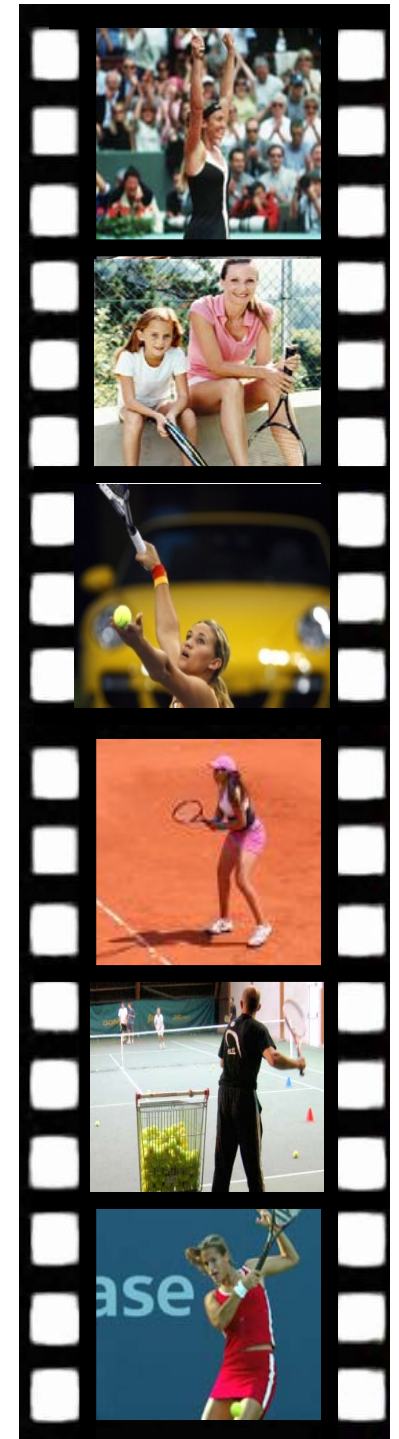
TRANS
faire

CONSEIL & FORMATION

Psychological characteristics of teen girl athletes

Helping teengirl involving competitions

OCT 24th 2008



introduction

In France, many girls (even good players) stop playing tennis when they are around thirteen.

At 13 years old, end of the puberty, teenage girls undergo a lot of physiological and psychological changes.

At 13 years old, competition becomes more present in coaches goals.

Hypotheses and understanding of this phenomenon

- **Hypothesis 1 : « masculine stereotype » (ethnological approach) has had too great an impact on feminine competition**

1.A brief recap: sport created by men for men

- Sport : a common treasure, a glory to man
- Male/female segregation still present in modern sport
- P de Coubertin hostile to « *female olympiade which could only be uninteresting, inesthetic and unseemly* »,

2. History of accession of women to sport is that of a conquest akin to that of right to vote...

- A) Male stereotype impact
- B) Female aggressiveness
- C) the new « amazons »

A) Impact of male stereotype on competitive practice of sport.

- The warrior hunter
 - aggressiveness and strength
 - the male hormone
- To men, being aggressive = being efficient, courageous
- Intrinsic masculine qualities = prominent in competition. What coaches look for and encourage

B) Female aggressiveness:

- ◆ For young girls, « aggressiveness » = hatred, violence
→ feelings of guilt and fear
- ◆ Female hormones develop other emotions
- ◆ Expecting them to be aggressive can result in
 - ◆ precipitation
 - ◆ fear and stress on court
 - ◆ exaggeration of aggression
 - ◆ eventually a possible abandon of sport.

C) The new amazons

- Amazons in Greek mythology
- Sportswomen = new amazons ?
 - Loss of femininity
 - Male attitudes
 - Vulnerability ?
 - Need for attention, support and affection in return

Confronting this hypothesis

- « Feminine » behaviours to live through sport?
- Does a young girl need to learn and love competition?



- **Hypothesis 2: quality of relationship as sole means of developing motivation and self confidence in girls**

1 The player / trainer interface

- Pleasing others
- Having a strong relationship with coach
- Rapport of seduction...
- Connection with the coach → Bad response **caution**
danger
- Inadequate encouragement and support → quits
competition

2 Female players in a group

- Privileged relationship within a group?
- Girls attuned to
 - Unspoken words
 - Attitudes
 - Time spent with each player (= attention)
- Use correct tone
- Pay attention to body language

- **Hypothesis 3:**

**Better taking into account differences
between boys and girls (bio-psycho-
social)**



A few reminders...

Girls and Boys in childhood:

- Parents' behavior
 - Emotional excesses
 - boys = anger
 - Girls = sadness
- Sexual differences anchored in brain
 - Male brain → testosterone
 - Female brain → oestrogene and progesterone

Early, a social and communicative being

- **Little girls** : intimacy and cooperative sharing
- **Boys** : competitive, individualistic behaviour
- **Girls** :
 - Create and maintain bonds
 - Put their own weaknesses forward
 - Valorise playmates
 - Collaborate and enjoy playing with best friend.



Young women and young men:

- Puberty : cyclic hormon levels → anxiety and storage of fatty tissue
- Creatures of sharing. Communicate indirectly (and a lot) to reinforce bonds

➤ Great need to exist, to affirm and achieve themselves



Teenage girls and anxiety

- Being anxious = doubting about what the future holds.
- At adolescence, girls preoccupied by image, results, performances...
 - Lesser resistance to failure
- Constant questions :
 - Am I good enough?
 - Will people still be interested in me if I fail?
 - Am I too fat, ugly?
 - Can someone love me?

And then...

Most of teenage girls today have a low self esteem

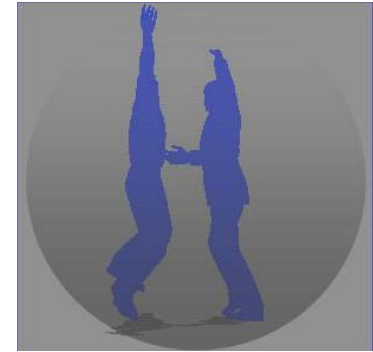
- Compared to boys, who often over-estimate their performance (intimidation effect), girls have a tendency to under-estimate (« I'm useless »).
- Bad self image
- Negative thoughts
- Self criticism...(body shape, weight = minefield)

Conclusion : what coach can do

- Teach girls to better express themselves in competition especially to improve their tolerance to failure:
 - Progressively stop under-estimating themselves
 - Build confidence while working hard on strengths
 - Encourage and point out decision making, effort
 - Make difference between self and performance
 - Help them achieve progressive goals
 - Defend a team or strong values

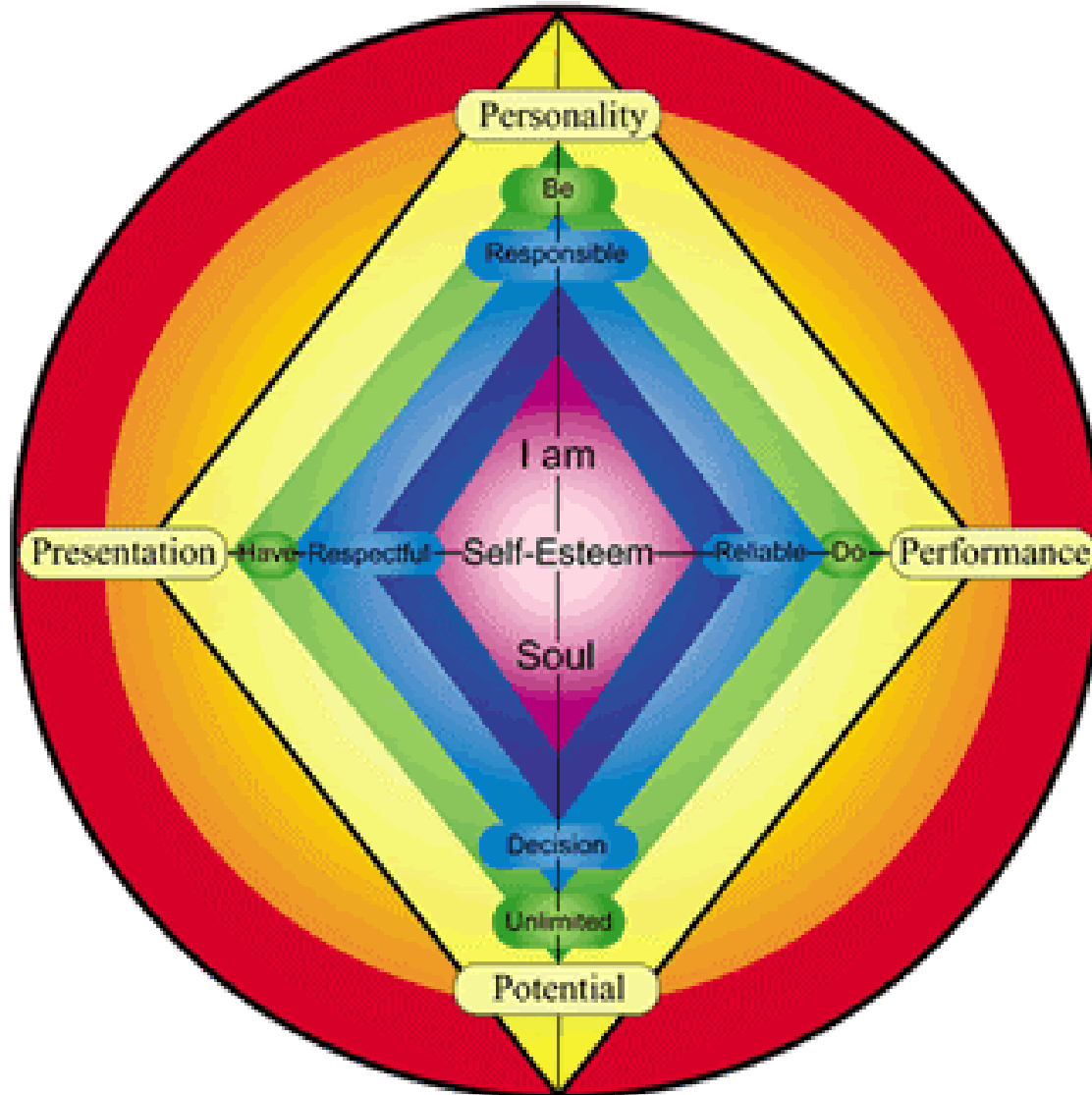
- **Aggressiveness is certainly not the only means to reach their goals:**
 - Use their thoughts, perceptions, emotions, images and body language, focus and effort to move ahead
 - Wanting the last word (tennis is a sport of exchange)
 - Knowing how to occupy space (finding one's place)
 - Believing in themselves beyond their image, training physically
 - Feeling always supported, encouraged

Sum up



- Time spent in discussion, communicating with a competitive girl, making her aware of her strengths and talents is never wasted time.
- Avoid to attack their confidence by **one** sentence or **one** act, either you will spend hours and hours rebuilding their self esteem.
- « Always remember the tremendous power you have as a coach to help another human being maximize his/her potential (and self esteem); pursue this awesome responsibility daily with intensity and integrity » IOC

♪ Diamonds are the girl best friend



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**Thank you for
your attention**

