



7 YEARS... THE REASONABLE AGE TO START A TOP TENNIS CAREER

HIGH LEVEL TENNIS REQUIREMENTS....

AND YOUNG GIRLS TRAINING !



EUROPEAN COACHES SYMPOSIUM
STOCKHOLM
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FÉDÉRATION FRANÇAISE DE TENNIS



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Summary

1. Which are the requirements to reach a world level in women tennis?
2. Precocity in female tennis: which are the abilities of a young girl age 7/ 8 ?
3. Is it important to play international competition before age 12 ?
4. Which are the psychological specificities among girls age 7 to 12 ?
5. Which is the parents' role to day?



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1. Which are the requirements to reach a world level in women tennis?



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KEY FIELDS IN TENNIS

HIGH LEVEL		INITIATION
MENTAL	↗	TECHNICAL
PHYSICAL	↘	PHYSICAL
TACTICAL		TACTICAL
TECHNICAL		MENTAL

According to the level of expertise, each field may have an opposite importance, but is nevertheless present



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MENTAL FIELD IN TENNIS

Like planets revolving around the Sun, mental strengths revolve around Self Esteem

- AMBITION
- AUTONOMY
- AWARENESS
- COMMITMENT
- CONCENTRATION
- DREAM
- IDENTIFICATION
- MOTIVATION
- PASSION
- SELFCONFIDENCE
- SELF-CONTROL



**HIGH LEVEL REQUIREMENTS:
PHYSICAL QUALITIES**

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- Coordination and skill
- Anticipation
- Speed and reactivity
- Dynamic balance
- Looseness
- Explosiveness
- Aerobic endurance
- Strength
- Power



**HIGH LEVEL REQUIREMENTS:
FOOTWORK**

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Key Points :

Dynamic ready position.

Split steps and explosive first step
Different stances: open, neutral or straight.
push on external leg

Mobility and variety in the steps

Combination of running steps, shuffled, and cross over steps, adjusting steps, sliding steps.

Different types of motion:

lateral, forwards and backwards
rhythm adapted to the courses
Quick bursts and sprints.

Adapted and systematic recovering





**HIGH LEVEL REQUIREMENTS:
TECHNIQUE**

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NECESSARY WEAPONS = Forehand (or Backhand) + First Serve

Return of serve:

- aggressive and decisive ...especially on 2nd serve

Serve:

- First ball with power, even if it is not a « full ace »
- Second ball, with topspin, but more often sliced



Ground strokes effectiveness:

- Hit the ball on the rise
- Speed of the ball
- Heavy strokes, with a lot of power
- Topspin in both sides

Volleys and smash:

- Classical as well as drive volleys
- Smash with power if possible, always with precision



**HIGH LEVEL REQUIREMENTS:
SERVICE**

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- Continental grip or better hammer grip
- Feet and shoulders orientation
- Toss of the ball with open hand and stretched arm
- Elbow positioning, a must for a fluid loop !
- Rhythm in the loop and hitting motion
- Elbow throwing forwards and upwards
- Stretching of the whole body at the impact point
- Arm folding in front the body at follow through

NB: all these instructions are feasible if:

- the young girl serves from the service ligne,
- use a suitable racquet
- play with transition balls!



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HIGH LEVEL REQUIREMENTS: TACTICS

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- Hit the ball hard from the base line, down the line or cross-court.
- Play winners down the line
- Change rhythms
- Vary effects
- Master volleys : classical and drive volleys
- Develop a truly decisive second shot.
- Game style : nearly the same patterns on clay courts and grass courts(difference with male tennis).



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2. Precocity and female tennis?

Which are the abilities of a young girl age 7/ 8 ?

CASE STUDY: TATIANA GOLOVIN



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PRECOCITY IN FEMALE TENNIS

This phenomenon is not a new one!!!

- Suzanne LENGLEN (FRA)** won the world Championships on clay when she was only 15 years old!
- Maureen CONNOLLY (USA)** won US Championships when she was 16!
- Tracy AUSTIN (USA)** achieved World Champion title being 17 years old.
- **Chris EVERT (USA)** won ROLAND GARROS when she was 19 years.
- **Monica SELES (USA)** won the World Champion title before her 18 birthday.
- Jennifer CAPRIATI (USA)** played semi final at Wimbledon being 15 years old.
won the Gold Medal in Barcelona 1992 at 16 years.
- **Iva MAJOLI (CRO)** won ROLAND GARROS title when she was 20.
- **Martina HINGIS (SUI)** achieved World Champion title being 17 years old.
- **Anna KOURNIKOVA (RUS)** played semi final at Wimbledon being 16 years old.
Fed Cup Team member being 14 years old.
- Marie PIERCE (FRA)** Runner up at Roland Garros in 1994, was only 19 years old
won the Australian Open in 1995 being 20 years old.



PRECOCITY IN FEMALE TENNIS

The new trend, nowadays, is that a large number of under 20 players reach the Top 50:

- Nicole VAIDISOVA (CZE) 23/04/1989 -17 years N° 11
- **Tatiana GOLOVIN (FRA) 25/01/1988 -18 years N° 21**
- Ana IVANOVIC (SCG) 6/11/1987 -18 years N° 15
- Maria SHARAPOVA (RUS) 19/04/1987-19 years N°3
Wins Wimbledon Championships in 2004 being 17 years old.
- Dinara SAFINA(RUS) 27/04/1986 -20 years N° 28
- Shuai PENG (CHN) 8/01/1986 -20 years N°41
- Marta DOMACHOWSKA (POL) 16/01/1986- 20 years N°52
- Anna CHAKVETADZE (RUS) 05/03/1987 19 years N° 24
- Maria KIRILENKO (RUS) 25/01/1987 19 years N° 33
- Lucie SAFAROVA (CZE) 04/02/1987 19 years N° 39
- Olga POUTCHKOVA (RUS) 27/09/1987 19 years N° 46

Sesil KARATANTCHEVA(BUL) 8/08/1989 -15 years ½ N° 89

- To day, no french player, except Tatiana, has been successfull in reaching a Top ranking at such a young age.



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It is impossible to deny precocity in female tennis!

I chose to explain Tatiana GOLOVIN development, because it appears to me that it will become more difficult to reach the top of WTA ranking if...

the young girl doesn't start at an early age

With adapted training methods which associate quality to a big amount of work.



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Tatiana GOLOVIN : *initiation and training*

- Tatiana started playing tennis in **Franche-Comté League** when she was 3 years old at **A.S.M Belfort Club**.
- From childhood she had physical training session at the rate of 1/2 hour per day.
- In 1995, during a visit in this League, Technical Director **Patrice DOMINGUEZ**, was amazed with her game's quality: **she was only 7 years old!**
- Her parents found insufficient the quantity of training sessions recommended through the « Future National Program » and...
- the whole family moved to **N. BOLLETTIERI Academy!**



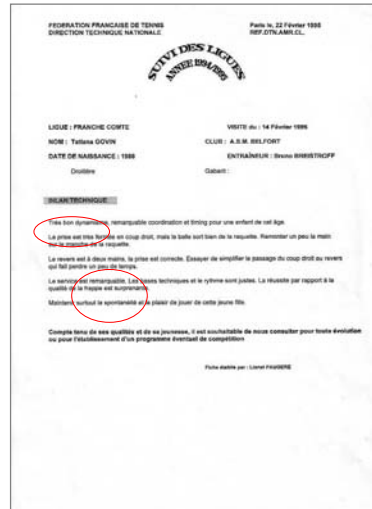
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Excellent dynamism ...
 Remarkable coordination and timing...
 Outstanding service ...
 Astonishing hitting quality...



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A champion « look »
 A devastating return of serve
 A topspin volley as efficient as her classical volley

*Rapport Strasbourg
 Juin 1997
 AM Rouchon*

La seule joueuse à échapper à ce tableau morose est **Tatiana Golovin**, qui a besoin d'une confrontation plus relevée pour donner pleine mesure à son talent : elle possède déjà un « look » de championne, un jeu de jambes précis, un retour cloutant l'adversaire sur place, un revers qui n'est pas sans rappeler celui de **C Evert**, une volée liftée aussi efficace que sa volée classique...seul, son coup droit manque encore un peu de dissociation.

Bien naturellement j'ai eu un entretien avec ses parents et **X. Nivelais**. Il apparaît que le choix entre le camp de **N. Bollettieri** et la ligue de Franche-Comté n'est pas encore fait...Peut-être faudra-t-il envisager une mutation vers la ligue de Paris, afin de faciliter les retours du père qui travaille en Finlande ! Compte tenu que cette joueuse précoce et très talentueuse est française, il sera judicieux de traiter son cas de manière exceptionnelle.



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T.GOLOVIN development in **Franche-Comté League**

- Moving back again to Franche-Comté in 1997 : Tatiana is only 9 years old: she is given an individual scholarship by the French Tennis Federation which allows her to have two daily individual lessons over six days with her coach Alain DALMASSO and Xavier NIVELAIS, Regional Technical Director.

- In July 1997, Tatiana wins the Interregional Competition for players age 10 in STRASBOURG. Then she is awarded the National Avenir Programme with one year anticipation: her parents refuse the offer... and Tatiana turns back to USA from october 1997 to february 1998.



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T.GOLOVIN development in **Franche-Comté League**

Once again, she is back to Franche-Comté in february 1998 : she is 10 years old!

To facilitate her schooling, she studies only in mornings and her practice sessions are usely two times per day and often three.

Tatiana plays few competitions but participates at **Challenge Reebok**: being only 10 years old,

Tatiana achieves the title playing the 11 years draw and takes victory over **Irena PAVLOVIC** (who is also born in1988 !)

Tatiana and her mother fly back to USA in february1999 and return to France at the beginning of 2001...

she works with Nicolas KLINGELSCMITT (Federal Coach temporarily attached to her individual training)



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FED CUP

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T.GOLOVIN Born in Moscou on 25-01-1988


GOLDEN RULE : MOST OF TOP 10 PLAYERS CROSS THE WTA RANKING WITH GIANT STEPS !

Tennis Europe

- 2000 = U14 : N°49 (12 years!)
- 2001 = U16 : N°310

WTA

- 2002 = N°375 (14 years!)
- 2003 = N°345
- 2004 = N°27
- 2005 = N°25 (17 years!)
- 2006 = N°21



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Obviously young girls training is closely connected with world level game

- Learning technics
- Discovering the right tactical plans
- Developing the specific physical skills
- Setting the psychological approach of individual game



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TECHNIQUE 7/8 YEARS : **FOOTWORK**

Mobility: moving forwards, backwards, sideways.
Jumps and split steps.
Dynamism in running action
Open stance as well as neutral stance.
Dynamic and static balance.
Move forward to the ball in diagonal: « V ».
Recovering skills.



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PHYSICAL QUALITIES 7/8 YEARS

QUALITIES TO DEVELOP:

- Coordination
- Speed
- Abdominals Strength
- Flexibility
- Endurance

Work load recommended : 2 h / week





TECHNIQUE 7/8 YEARS
GROUND STROKES

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Teach and develop :

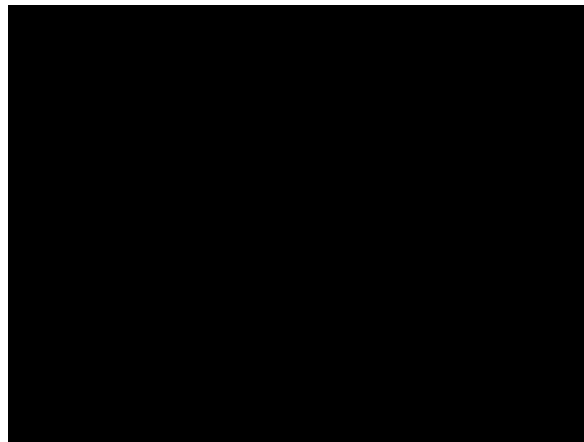
- quick visual information.
- pre dynamic footwork action
- corrects grips, to hit forehands, backhands (one and two handed).
- early turn of shoulders with backswing of the racquet.
- forward swing path from low to high
- contact point in front of the body and weight transfer.
- correct distance around the ball
- complete follow through of the racquet.
- recovery of ready position after the hit.



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TECHNIQUE 7/8 YEARS SERVICE

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- Grips: continental to « hammer » grip (a must!)
- Correct stance and shoulders position
- Mastering the toss of the ball
- Control of elbow position (a must!)
- Rhythm in the loop and in hitting motion
- Elbow extension upward and forward
- Stretch arm and body at hitting point
- Follow through with racquet crossing in front the body
- Move forwards after hitting

NB: no legs action at the beginning, no power research!

To realize these instructions, the young girl should serve from the service line, with suitable racquet.



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TECHNIQUE 7/8 YEARS:
VOLLEYS

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The easiest and funny stroke to learn, but too often lately taught.

- Ready position
- Grips:
 - eastern grip for the forehand volley
 - continentale grip for backhand volley(single hand as soon as possible!)
- Split step synchronized with the opponent hit.
- Reduced backswing
- Contact point in front of the body.
- Keep the wrist firm
- Move forwards when hitting.



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PLAYING DOUBLES AT 7/8 YEARS

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YOUNG GIRLS LOVE TO PLAY DOUBLES

Playing doubles brings to the young girls what they expect from the game:

- Share pleasure on court with a roommate
- Discover new strokes
- Earn confidence
- Take responsibility and make decision
- No stress with defeat



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3. Is it important to play international competition before age 12 ?
Which goals ? Titles or experience?



UNDER 12 COMPETITION

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TOP 10-12 BRESSUIRE

Virginie RAZZANO
Winner 1994

Sesil KARATANCHEVA
Winner 2001



Nathalie DECHY
Winner 1990



Anne-Gaëlle SIDOT
Winner 1988





UNDER 12 COMPETITION

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OPEN SUPER 12 in AURAY



Kim CLIJSTERS
Winner 1995



Justine HENIN
Runner Up 1994



Nathalie DECHY
1/8 Final 1991

Amélie MAURESMO
½ Finalist 1991



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UNDER 12 COMPETITION

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International Competition Under 12 is only official since year 2000!

Before age 12, victory is significant but is not a guarantee to succeed in a professional carrier!

Nevertheless, at this age, competition brings a lot of experience!

Travel abroad with a coach

Play team matches with coaching on court and receive mental support

Discover the way of life of professional: public, center court, press conference

Practice every day on physical and tactical fields.



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4. Which are the psychological specificities among girls age 7 to 12 ?



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**PSYCHOLOGICAL SPECIFICITIES:
GIRLS 7/8 YEARS**

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**Importance of coach and parent's communication.
Have fun through the game is a critical point during the development.
Trigger the girl's curiosity for the game.
Understand her representation of the game is quite essential.**

**Very often her game's representation is totally linked with her parents, particularly her father.
The young girl needs positive short term results : as soon as she doesn't succeed, she stops improving : she can't deal with failure »**



**PSYCHOLOGICAL SPECIFICITIES:
GIRLS 7/8 YEARS**

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The young girl player prefers to collaborate rather than compete.

She wants to share friendship in her games.

She looks for company, no confrontation (which is rather a male behaviour).

The young girl feels bad in match play situations in single and must be prepared for it
The young girl needs to be reassured, to be proved that her close friends and family love her.



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PSYCHOLOGICAL SPECIFICITIES: GIRLS 7/8 YEARS

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Aggressiveness is not natural quality in female temper !

Hormones and especially testosterone explain the male behaviour...

Coaches use very often an aggressive speech with female player, as a way to develop the necessary aggressiveness to succeed in competition.

When you ask to a young girl to be aggressive, she feels very unhappy, because she thinks she has to hate her opponent and she is afraid to lose other's love!

For this reason, the young female tennis player needs to be over protected ...which makes a female group practice hard to manage!

PSYCHOLOGICAL SPECIFICITIES: GIRLS 7/8 YEARS

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Once she knows that she will be protected, that she is not judged but loved...
then the young female player is ready to « act like a machine »

Among other reasons, this psychological behaviour may explain the «**stereotyped**»
female game.

**The female player is totally under domination of her coach and trusts his
advices...** « my coach wants me to win, so I do what he says ».

On the opposite side, a more creative game imply that the player is more self
sufficient, less « under domination » and able to make her own choices.

**The relationship between coach and female player is like a true couple and may
bring about marriage.**

**On the other hand, this particular relation explains why so many fathers decide
to be their daughter's coach.**



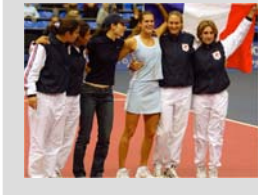
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5. Which is the parents' role to day?



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Familial tennis project must be really strong!

nevertheless ...be careful with parents over involved in their daughter's tennis career:

a lot of success on sport aspect but... a lot of family struggles!

To day we know a lot of Fathers Coaches on the WTA Tour...

A new « parent's race » has appeared : with the huge financial offers, pushing fathers decide (even if they don't know how to play tennis) to take their revenge on the society through their daughter and they give a big motivation and strong will to their daughter which help them to go for a top professional carrier.

But to be successful, the parent's involment must progressively stand aside, so that the young player can appropriate her own project



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COACHES / PARENTS RELATION

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Once as a coach, we work with a talented young player, we have to behave in a specific way:

- Understand the family project, why they are so much involved in their daughters's game, their rights.
- Collaborate with them, instead of fighting and pull them out.
- Associate the parents to the decisions , choice of programs
- Set behaviour rules and have them respected
- Let them know about positive or negative impact of their communication on their daughter's self esteem and the risk about such a choice.



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Yes ! Training for world level at an early age is possible...

- If the coach knows how to deal with the young girls psychological specificities ...and adapts his teaching methods.
- If the coach takes care of the physical abilities ... and adapts his teaching process.
- If the coach is aware of mental or physical risks of burn out and do everything possible to protect the young talented girl.



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YOUNG GIRLS CAN HANDLE WITH

HIGH LEVEL TENNIS REQUIREMENTS !!!

Thank you for your attention



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