

THE WHY

2021 NATIONWIDE JUNIOR COMPETITIVE STRUCTURE



HISTORY

An epidemic of declining youth sport participation has been prevalent throughout the United States over the past several years, and this has included youth tennis participation. The current USTA structure and events were found to be “overwhelmingly confusing,” “too competitive,” and “not fun.” USTA junior tournaments have seen a decline in participation and retention over the past 10 years.

This data led to the Youth Competition Department conducting a full evaluation of its competitive pathway by sanctioning a research project led by the University of Central Florida (UCF). One of the intentions of this research was to complement the work that had already been done over the previous few years:



Positioning Youth Tennis for Success

Published by Brian Hainline, MD (2013)

“How do we make tennis competition more accessible, more affordable, and more attractive to parents and kids? More of the same is not an acceptable answer.”

Brian Hainline, MD | NCAA Chief Medical Officer



Sport For All - Play For Life

Published by The Aspen Institute: Project Play (2014)

“If we are going to ensure that all kids have the chance to grow up fit and strong, we must, among other efforts, eliminate the barriers to sports participation.”

Tom Farrey | Executive Director, Sports & Society Program

The main objective of the UCF research was to understand the factors that contribute to attracting and retaining more tennis players in tournament and team competitions. The research focused on feedback from parents, players, coaches, and tennis industry stakeholders.

A significant finding from UCF was the need to develop an [American Development Model](#) (ADM), which would promote a tennis program delivery system that would align all stakeholders to attract and retain more youth players. The past several months have been devoted to the creation of an ADM for the USTA, which now has the full backing of the USTA's Sports Science Committee as well as Dr. Brian Hainline. One of the guiding principles of the ADM is the need to provide programming curriculum that supports developmentally appropriate training and competition to facilitate competence and confidence for youth tennis players.

Tying into the ADM, much of the UCF research feedback centered around the need for a consistent, clear, and simple pathway. The leader of the research project, Dr. Jill Fjelstul (Associate Professor, Rosen College of Hospitality Management at UCF), had this to note at the conclusion of the research: "A challenge is the perception noted by all stakeholders of the inconsistent pathway for youth players." Creating a balanced schedule of quality events that focus on fun, health, well-being, player development, and lifelong love of the game is key to reversing the trend of declining youth tennis participation. The unifying of all 17 USTA sections on the Junior Competitive Structure and developing a nationwide system establishes exactly what our consumers both want and need, allowing the USTA to simplify and enhance our overall tennis ecosystem.

PARENT QUOTES FROM UCF RESEARCH

"Tennis is taking away some of the fun and pushing for a more competitive experience to the detriment of kids physically and mentally."

"There's too much pressure on playing just one sport; it leads to repetitive use injuries and burnout."

"Too competitive for young ages, not fun, and it's just about points and winning even for young kids."

"The website, the structure, the service, and often the professionals can be overwhelmingly confusing and seemingly unnecessarily complicated creating a barrier that prevents tennis from growing."

"Coaching and USTA events are too expensive. I do not think anyone really knows the average cost per month."

"Love the sport and would like locating tournaments to be easier and less expensive."