

Touring with Under 14 Players

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A tennis coach, apart from teaching tennis, also plays many roles, on and off the court. One of the most important aspects to deal with is travelling with players to tournaments. Depending on the age group and gender, the responsibilities vary significantly. Job requirements too are different depending on the duration of the tour and if it is domestic or international.

In this article, the focus will be on Under- 14 players. Mostly, it would mean dealing with the 13 and 12 year olds and some 14 year olds. In every sense, they are still kids and would behave as such!! Taking this aspect into account, the primary necessity of the coach is to dealing with all issues on and off the court during the tour.

Typical characteristics of Under - 14 players that coaches should consider are:



1. **PHYSICAL:** These groups of kids, especially boys are very physical, in the sense, they touch and tap and kick etc.... while interacting with each other .Their fun games involve running, chasing, jumping etc.. They are always playing pranks and very active throughout the day. This takes away lot of energy. After a long day at the courts, when they get back to the room, they take an hour or so to settle down, before they hit the bed. These factors shall be kept in mind, while planning their daily schedule. With girls, this is not a significant issue.

2. **CURIOS:** As they are getting to know their way around, they are very curious and inquisitive. Be prepared for some serious interrogation!!!! Yes, they DO ask lot of questions, both related to tennis and general topics. By showing patience and helping them find answers, will go a long way in establishing a rapport and earning their respect.

3. **INTROVERTED:** As it could be one of their first few tours with you, they still aren't too familiar with you. Hence, they will keep a distance, until they get to know you. Male coaches with a girl's team will experience it more. Care shall be taken, while speaking, so as not to take too much liberty with them. Giving them space and not misinterpreting their approach as indifference will help in better communication between the coach and the players, in future.

4. **DISORGANISED:** It is not often that you would find, well organised kids at the age of 12 or 13. They would require help, to take care of themselves and their belongings. Helping them to be responsible without being too judgmental can go a long way in making them independent and confident in themselves. However, care

shall be taken not to over do, while helping them get organised. The key is in making sure they accomplish what you expect them to achieve.

5. HOME SICKNESS: There are occasions when one of the players, start feeling home sick especially if their results are not up to their expectations. Talking to them and involving them in activities, where in, they are with other players, thereby keeping them occupied will help them get over it.

6. UNFAMILIARITY: Being on one of their first tours, most things are not very familiar to them. This is an important factor to deal with, as being on tour, is all about adapting. Helping the players adapt to the totally new atmosphere, like playing conditions, food habits and a different group of people every week, will see them perform better as the tour progresses.

The above characteristics are very specific to the 14 and Under kids, irrespective of the nature of tournament or tour. Now, we take a look at few other factors related to:

NATIONAL TOURNAMENTS

Most often, the tournaments, in India, are not very far away from home and travelling time is also less, over night by train, in most cases. The venue and atmosphere is quite similar to the ones, the player normally practices in. Except in a few States, the language is also familiar. These factors make it easier for the player to adapt to his new conditions. In making the players understand the differences and helping them adapt, can result in your players performing closer to their potential, even on their first tour.

INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENTS

Travelling abroad is totally a different experience for all, including adults. You can imagine the effect it has on these young kids!!! For most, it will be their first trip abroad and may be, in an aircraft, as well. The excitement and anxiety levels are bound to be high, even as you receive them at the airport. Once, they are at the tournament venue, they experience a different feeling, as they try to take in all that they see, which is nowhere close to their familiar surroundings. Different people, language and playing facilities can unnerve even the toughest of the kids.



On the positive effects of the same experience, the opponents are unknown, and the player can play without any pressure or expectations. Occasionally, this can result in some brilliant performances. The coach should help the players be at ease and not let these surroundings have a significant effect on their performance levels.

DURATION OF THE TOUR

This is a very important factor to consider from the beginning of the tour. If it is a long tour involving 3 and more weeks on road, the basic objective shall be to keep them match fit, for all those weeks. The first 2 weeks are very crucial as care must be taken not to over train the players. Practice sessions and training programs have to be carefully monitored. This will ensure that the players stay in their best shape as they enter the last tournament of the tour.

A good understanding of the above characteristics and factors can help the coach get the best out of their players in terms of behaviour and performance. May your future tours with Under -14 players, be enjoyable and productive like never before.