

# COACH PERFORMANCE

## GUIDING GENERATION NEXT

Australia's next generation of players have reason to be excited, as many high-profile current and former players take their first official steps to a coaching career.



Sam Groth can still recall the profound influence of the coaches who helped his journey that started as a talented junior in rural New South Wales to becoming the 2015 Newcombe Medallist, Australia's highest annual honour in the sport. So, when the chance arose for Groth to gain a Tennis Australia qualification, the talented ex-player grabbed it with both hands.

"The opportunity to get out on the court and coach, obviously you want to have some involvement directly in tennis moving forward, and obviously just the chance to at least get qualified and give myself those chances moving forward is a positive," he said.

Among the top Australian players who are transitioning from life on tour to post-playing careers, Groth joined Casey Dellacqua, Jelena Dokic, Sally Peers, Lauren

Breadmore, Chris Guccione, Greg Jones, Ben Mitchell and Blake Mott in completing Tennis Australia's ITF-recognised Junior Development Coaching Course.

Underlining the value that's attached to the official coach qualification, current players Storm Sanders, Gavin Van Peperzeel and Belinda Woolcock were also among the group completing the course.

That such high-profile participants came together to further their tennis education also helped dispel the common myth that a career as a player automatically qualifies a former pro as a coach. While former players can obviously bring a wealth of experience into a coaching career, there's a corresponding requirement to develop specific coaching skills. "It's pretty natural as an elite tennis player, to want to fall into coaching," explained former world No.4 Dokic. "Obviously, my brain's full of

knowledge of tennis but there's nothing like getting out here and learning more about the game and also, obviously, getting those qualifications under your belt.

"It's certainly a pathway that I feel I want to learn more about and be qualified in so that I'm confident, if I get out on court with players, that I know what I'm talking about from a coaching perspective, because I think it's very different having been a player, to make that transition to coaching."

Belinda Colaneri, the Coach Developer leading the course conducted at the National Tennis Centre in Melbourne, was delighted to guide athletes so keen to develop those skills.

"First and foremost, it is definitely about the learning," said Colaneri, Tennis Australia's Coach Education Manager.

"We want them to be positive people who understand the value of learning and know that's an important part of who they are now, but also how they can continue to get better."

Gaining the Junior Development coaching qualification, in which participants also complete a Certificate III in Sport Coaching, provides a valuable first step. Taken through the Blue, Red, Orange and Green stages of the ANZ Tennis Hot Shots program, participants gained valuable insights both on and off the court.

"Within the course, we also cover inclusion, tennis in schools, conflict management and the role and responsibilities of coaching," added Colaneri. "The focus is on building a solid foundation for our participants to become lifelong learners".

While developing their skills, the former players also

gained the credentials that have become an official - and welcome - requirement of any coach.

"There are now ITF regulations that require coaches working with juniors and particularly representative teams to have a qualification to be able to take on these opportunities," Colaneri explained.

Many Junior Development Coaching Course participants experienced representative tours as young players, and appreciated the chance to "officially" transition their careers.

As former Australian representative Sally Peers pointed out, "just because you're a really good player, doesn't make you a very good coach. So that's why I'm here to learn and I've had some really good people around me that have helped me in that transition and in just delivering and helping me understand how people learn tennis."

For some, a coaching career is one that might sit alongside other post-playing pursuits in tennis. Three-time Australian Open main draw entrant Breadmore has developed a business and explains "I'm reconnecting back my experience in business and also education in sport."

Breadmore is achieving that outcome through a tennis program for around 500 students at Melbourne's Wesley College. The completion of the Junior Development Coaching qualification provides a boost



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for students in the school's high performance program.

"Students are very much on the US college pathway, they're looking to turn professional, so I'm here to learn more about how I can bring out the best in those students and make sure they have a great experience going forward," Breadmore explained.

While Dellacqua isn't completely certain if coaching will become a full-time career, she has a special interest in the junior space.

"To work in helping the real young ones," said the much-loved Australian, who announced her retirement earlier this year.

"With high performance, it's great. I've done high performance playing for a long time, but I feel like those junior girls are really rewarding. You can teach them a lot and hopefully I can make a difference."

Peers, who notes the special connection she developed with her mother Elizabeth's long-time influence in coaching, similarly appreciates connecting young players with the sport.

"I'm absolutely loving spending time, just really appreciating tennis at a simple level that it's just a sport that everyone can have a go at. And just try to keep as any girls and kids getting into tennis as we can.

"It's really rewarding seeing the smiles on their faces when they make contact with the ball and

**SPECIALISED SKILLS:** While bringing a wealth of experience from their life on tour, players also appreciate the importance of gaining an ITF-recognised coaching qualification.

we're busy worrying about trying to hit the cone. And they're just happy to make contact so yeah. It just brings you back a little bit."

As others, like Dokic, consider the possibility of coaching professional players, there is the chance to carry unique insights into their second careers.

"It's a whole lot of that kind of experience and what you've gone through, what that looks like, that you can bring to the table and talk to them about, tell them about," said the former Wimbledon semifinalist.

"There's so many different stories and experiences, and what it's like to walk on Rod Laver arena for example, what that looks like. Then, also how to get there, and how to work and have that discipline to get there."

Certainly the developing athletes will be in good hands. Given the dedication that shaped their careers as professionals, such high profile former and current player will bring many qualities as a coach. **ATM**

## A WORLD-CLASS START

As the likes of Jelena Dokic, Sam Groth and Casey Dellacqua took the first steps in their coaching careers, there was a further reminder that any aspiring player who learns the game from a Tennis Australia qualified coach can expect a world-class introduction to the sport.

Tennis Australia coaching courses are officially recognised by the International Tennis Federation [ITF].

Andrea Buckeridge, Tennis Australia's Manager of Education and Professional Learning believes that the professionalism that shaped the notable careers of former players who recently completed the Junior Development Coaching course complement the quality of coach education that the national body provides.

"Acquiring a formal coaching qualification is an integral part of transitioning from playing on the circuit to helping to develop the next generation of players," Buckeridge explained.

"These former players have fantastic experience and insights into life on the tour and how to develop as a player, and this course will help them use their existing knowledge to guide young players both on and off the court."

"Australia was one of the first tennis nations to achieve the ITF gold level recognition for coach education and we are continuing to develop new strategies to ensure world's best practice in our coaching community."

Tennis Australia offers a comprehensive education pathway to train coaches to develop players at all levels of the sport, from ANZ Tennis Hot Shots right through to elite performance pathways. The coaching courses currently available are: Foundation, Community, Junior Development, Club Professional, Master Club Professional and High Performance.

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