

The importance of winning a junior Grand Slam for professional success

By Danielle Gescheit

The junior tennis pathway to achieving a top 100 pro players is long and arduous. From their first junior point to reaching a top 100 junior ranking, takes players 4-years on average. It then takes another 4 years, on average, to transition time from completing the junior tour to reaching a top 100 professional ranking...if they actually manage to get there. However, win a junior Grand Slam and the odds of reaching a top 100 pro ranking increases substantially.

Over the 10-year period of 2004-2013, 97.5% of female and 63% of male junior Grand Slam winners went on to achieve a top 100 pro ranking (Table 1). Interestingly, the numbers reduce substantially for runners up, with 75% of female and only 35% of male junior Grand Slam runners up achieved a top 100 pro ranking (Table 2). The reason for such is unclear but may be attributable to heightened physical capacity, technical and tactical prowess or even psychological strength of the winners as compared to the runners up.

Table 1: Percentage of junior Grand Slam WINNERS (2004-2013) who transitioned to the ATP/WTA top 100

Gender	Australian Open	Roland Garros	Wimbledon	US Open
Male	60%	60%	70%	60%
Female	100%	100%	90%	100%

Table 2: Percentage of junior Grand Slam RUNNERS UP (2004-2013) who transitioned to the ATP/WTA top 100

Of note, from 1980-2003, the male junior Grand Slam winner transition rate to top 100 pro was 81.5% and females, 89%.

Gender	Australian Open	Roland Garros	Wimbledon	US Open
Male	20%	40%	20%	60%
Female	90%	70%	80%	60%

Therefore, in the following 10-years, the female transition rate has increased and the males decreased. This may be explained by the ageing of the professional top 100. Specifically, the average age of the professional male top 100 has increased from 25.5 in 2004 to 27.6 in 2013, whereas the rise has been smaller in females, with the average top 100 age being 24.5 in 2004 and 25.4 in 2013. The rise in top 100 average age is largely attributable to professional players competing for longer and retaining their ranking. As reference, you don't need to look much further than Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and the Williams sisters. Therefore, it is seemingly longer and harder for junior male players to break into the top 100.

Overall, keep your eyes out on the finalists, and primarily female winners of each of the junior Grand Slams. They will provide insight into who will likely compete in the professional Grand Slams in the coming years and also have ownership in the professional top 100.