

## **Hamid Hejazi – Written evidence (NPS0095)**

My name is Hamid Hejazi and I am 41 years old. I have played tennis since I was 12 and reached a national level, competing around the world in junior and men's events. I have been coaching for the last 21 years, currently head coach at a club, running the LTA's Cambridge performance centre, and run Over & In, a business offering tennis and football coaching to clubs and communities in Herts and Cambs. Here are seven ideas to improve participation, diversity and standards.

### **1. Better coaching**

Coaches are simply not good enough because it's too easy to become one. There is no minimum playing level. In golf, you need to be a five handicap or better, so its coaches earn good money and are treated like professionals. Tennis coaches are all regarded equally, which is so very demoralising if you're good. Tennis coaching has become all about making money. Who wants two kids on a court playing a match when you can get ten of them sitting on their backsides at a summer camp making you loads of money for doing nothing? The LTA should ask itself why tennis is based around coaching and not competition.

### **2. More competition.**

We need more reasons to play the game regularly and competitively, in the form of a competition structure like the German club league, or football here. The LTA should have a total overhaul and be supporting coaches to run tournaments instead of camps and groups. In countries like Spain, France, Germany and Italy tennis is built around a competition structure. That's why they produce and retain so many good players.

### **3. Performance Gap**

The gap between the elite of the game and the rest is far too wide. Why don't we use our top British players to help grow the game and inspire the next generation? In the UK you either play tennis for fun or to become a professional. Too many good players stop playing when they realise, they aren't going to make it at the top level.

### **4. The high cost...and one small solution.**

The cost of tennis is still way too high for all to participate regularly enough to benefit. For most people to play tennis they must have a coaching session, this involves money. If you are middle class, what's £35 an hour for a tennis lesson (plus membership, a racket, trainers) but if you are poor then how do you play? Playing once a week is simply not enough to benefit from all the great things that come with playing the sport. I have set up my own charitable tennis foundation to get more socially deprived and disabled children playing tennis. It's called Richard Darton Tennis Foundation.

### **5. Keeping Girls Playing...two simple solutions.**

One of the biggest headaches for tennis coaches, as in other sports, is the loss of teenage girls. They are put off sport by certain things, and attracted away by other things. Coaches can't do much about the latter, but we can make tennis

more attractive. In my experience some talented young female players are put off competition, so I don't force them to compete. Also, the LTA requires children to be grouped by age and/or ability which can split up female peer groups. I found that when I kept the girls together for coaching, the dropout rate fell by a huge amount.

#### 6. The LTA, Let's Try Again

The LTA needs to advise not dictate. I would love to know how much money the LTA has wasted on unread literature and 'goodies'. The flyers, posters, t-shirts, and wristbands I see lying around tennis clubs all over the county is testament to a scandalous waste of money. It seems there's a new expensive initiative every week. So how can you engage and support a body who has changed their strategy so many times?

#### 7. Clubs

Club tennis must be the heart of the sport with the best players staying in clubs, not being removed to centres that can ruin them. If a good player is identified, let the LTA support come to them, rather than extract them from the very environment that had nurtured them. Imagine club tennis where facilities were improved, with more floodlit courts, and with coaches who had all played to a decent standard. The level of club tennis would rise significantly, giving regular local opportunities for players to compete. Keeping national level players at their clubs would allow future players an insight into the level of the game, and not all think they are future stars.

Finally, too many tennis clubs are unwelcoming to newcomers. When strangers approach some clubs they're told to go away as it's members only. At my club, we'll put a ball and racket in their hands and a smile on their face.

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