

**TRANSITIONING OUT OF THE PROFESSIONAL PLAYER PATHWAY:
A GROUNDED THEORY ON THE PROCESS IN SOUTH AFRICAN
MEN'S TENNIS**

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DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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voice in this work will continue to echo for generations to come. Thanks to you, we as researchers, policy makers, stakeholders, practitioners and future South African tennis players have a reference point for development and transitions that is rooted in South African soil.

DEDICATION

To all children in sport, I dedicate this work to you. My hope for you is that you will be seen, known and appreciated for the person you are beyond the sports arena. Know that your value is immeasurable and transcends performance outcomes. In a world with billions of people, there is only one YOU. You are here on purpose! It is because of you and your uniqueness that I continue to wrestle with questions around what it means to be human and what it means to be human in sport.

SUMMARY

To understand and describe the athlete and their environment(s), researchers, historically, have confined their description of retrospective events, such as sport participation, development, career transitions, etc., to the sport context. This approach has been limiting to researchers' scope of interpretation (qualitative designs) and / or projection (quantitative designs) of past, present and future (athletic) selves along with transitioning and non-transitioning sporting careers. In other words, the person and athlete are portrayed as mutually exclusive. Considering this, the motivation for the current research project was to understand, reimagine and amplify the human experience of South African men's tennis players, i.e., the people within their development pathways. To do this, a rigorous constructivist grounded theory (GT) methodology was employed both as the research process and as a strategy to generate theory. This GT study explored South African men's tennis player transitions within and out of the professional player pathway in the Western Cape Province, South Africa.

Four research questions guided the study: 1) what is happening in the development process of a promising competitive junior tennis player in the Western Cape, South Africa?; 2) what is happening [on and off the court] in the development of these players?; 3) what are the transitional processes throughout the junior career pathway and how are these transitions understood?; and 4) how do men's tennis players [with a promising national junior ranking] transition out of the professional player pathway? To best answer these research questions, a range of tennis participants ($n = 34$) were selected using purposeful sampling (theoretical sampling) along with maximum variation sampling. Data collection entailed semi-structured interviews augmented with observational work. Theory generation adhered to the procedures for constructivist GT analysis (initial codes, focused codes, categories and categories underpinning theory).

As a result, a GT model that explains South African men's tennis player development and transition processes was developed. This model is underpinned by eight core categories: 1) pursuing a rich man's sport; 2) transitioning steps; 3) playing inside the lines [small world]; 4) SA Coaching world; 5) life orbiting tennis; 6) college: driving the tennis vehicle; 7) manhood eclipsing childhood; and 8) being a pro at life, not tennis.

The practical implications of this model are recognised firstly in its approach to tennis development, i.e., placing greater emphasis on the person and their individual life transitions and how these influence their tennis trajectories. Secondly, this model provides a unique context to

the South African tennis player journey. A journey that Tennis South Africa's (TSA) current long-term player development model (LTPD) generically and collectively attempts to accommodate in a long-term development plan. However, without context and individual experiences of junior to senior transitions, i.e., sport within life domains, the South African tennis player remains (figuratively) confined to a linear, reductionist and prescriptive approach to development and the complexity of their path is grossly misunderstood and misrepresented.

A practical recommendation for TSA is to accommodate the doubles format as a mechanism for tennis development and utilize it as a viable professional tennis pathway.

Keywords: Youth sport; South African tennis development; Junior to senior transitions; USA College tennis; Qualitative research

OPSOMMING

In 'n poging om die atleet en hul omgewing(s) te verstaan en te beskryf, het navorsers histories gesproke hul beskrywing van retrospektiewe gebeure soos sportdeelname, ontwikkeling, loopbaan veranderinge, ens., tot die sport konteks beperk. Hierdie benadering het beperkend op navorsers se omvang van interpretasie (kwalitatiewe ontwerp) en / of projeksie (kwantitatiewe ontwerp) van die verlede, hede en toekomstige (atletiese) eie-ek, tesame met veranderende en nie-veranderende sport loopbane, ingewerk. Met ander woorde, die persoon en atleet word as wedersyds eksklusief uitgebeeld. Met dit in gedagte, was die motivering vir die huidige navorsingsprojek om die menslike ervaring van Suid-Afrikaanse mans tennisspelers, dit wil sê, die persone binne hulle ontwikkelingsroetes te verstaan, opnuut te bedink en toe te lig. Om dit te vermag is 'n onbuigsame konstruktivisties gegronde teoretiese (GT) metodologie gebruik as beide die navorsingsproses en as 'n strategie om die teorie te genereer. Hierdie GT studie het Suid-Afrikaanse mans tennisspeler veranderinge binne en buite die professionele arena in die Wes-Kaapse Provinsie in Suid-Afrika ondersoek.

Vier navorsingsvrae rig die huidige studie: 1) wat gebeur in die ontwikkelingsprosesse van 'n belowende mededingende junior tennisspeler in Wes-Kaapland, Suid-Afrika?; 2) wat gebeur [op en van die baan] in die ontwikkeling van hierdie spelers?; 3) wat is die oorgangprosesse tydens die junior beroepsloopbaan en hoe word hierdie veranderinge verstaan?; en 4) hoe verlaat mans tennisspelers [met 'n belowende nasionale junior ranglys posisie] uit die professionele ontwikkelingsroete? Om hierdie navorsingsvrae ten beste te beantwoord is verskeie tennisspelers ($n = 34$) deur middel van doelgerigte steekproefneming geselekteer (teoretiese steekproefneming) saam met maksimum variasie steekproefneming. Data insameling het semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude behels wat deur waarneming aangevul is. Teorie generering het getrou gebly aan die prosedures vir konstruktivisties GT analise (aanvanklike kodes, gefokusde kodes, kategorieë en kategorieë wat teorie ondersteun).

As gevolg hiervan is 'n Gegronde Teoretiese model ontwikkel wat die Suid-Afrikaanse mans tennisspelers se ontwikkeling en veranderende prosesse verduidelik. Hierdie model word gerugsteun deur agt kernkategorieë: 1) die beoefening van 'n rykmansport; 2) oorgangstappe; 3) speel binne die lyne [klein wêreld]; 4) Suid-Afrikaanse (SA) Afrigtingswêreld; 5) lewensbaan tennis; 6) kollege: bestuur die tennis voertuig; 7) manlikheid wat die kinderjare verduister; en 8) om professioneel in lewe te wees, nie tennis nie.

Die praktiese implikasies van hierdie model word eerstens erken in die benadering tot tennisontwikkeling, dit wil sê meer klem op die persoon en hul individuele lewensorgange en hoe dit hulle tennis ontwikkelingsroete beïnvloed. Tweedens voorsien hierdie model 'n unieke konteks aan die Suid-Afrikaanse tennisspeler se reis – 'n reis wat Tennis Suid-Afrika (TSA) se langtermyn speler ontwikkelingsmodel (LTSO) generies en gesamentlik poog om in 'n langtermyn ontwikkelingsprogram te akkommodeer. Dit is egter so dat sonder konteks en individuele ervarings van junior tot senior oorgangstydperke, dit wil sê, sport binne die lewensdomein, bly Suid-Afrikaanse tennisspelers (figuurlik) beperk tot 'n liniêre, reduksionistiese en voorskriftelike benadering tot ontwikkeling en die kompleksiteit van die spelers se loopbane word erg misverstaan en verkeerd voorgestel.

'n Praktiese aanbeveling vir TSA is om die dubbelspel formaat as 'n meganisme vir tennisontwikkeling te implementeer en om dit as 'n lewensvatbare professionele roete aan te wend.

Sleutelwoorde: Jeugsport; Suid-Afrikaanse tennisontwikkeling; Junior tot senior oorgange; VSA Kollege tennis; Kwalitatiewe navorsing

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACD	Athlete Career Sport Psychology Discourse
ACSM	American College of Sports Medicine
ATP	Association of Tennis Professionals
ATDE	Athletic Talent Development Environment
BMIQ	Biological Maturation Identification Questionnaire
CMT	Career Motivation Theory
DMSPP	Development Model of Sport Participation
DPTFA	Developmental Perspective on Transitions Faced by Athletes
GPA	Grade Point Average
GT	Grounded Theory
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
ISSP	International Society of Sport Psychology
ITF	International Tennis Federation
ITFJC	International Tennis Federation Junior Circuit
LTAD	Long Term Athlete Development
LTPD	Long Term Player Development
PHV	Peak Height Velocity
PYD	Positive Youth Development
PRO	Professional
ORU	Oral Roberts University
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
SA	South Africa
SASCOC	South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee
SCM	Sport Commitment Model
SRSA	Sport and Recreation for the Republic of South Africa
TSA	Tennis South Africa
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
USTA	United States Tennis Association
WHO	World Health Organization

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Introduction

Human beings participate in sport for a variety of reasons. Children's participation in sport – youth sport – is underpinned by a motivation to have fun, be with their friends, experience challenges associated with learning new skills and fostering a sense of belonging (Temple & Crane, 2016). Fraser-Thomas and Strachan (2015) proposed that youth sport should provide: 1) an opportunity “to be physically active and healthy”, 2) an environment that encourages the development of motor skills underpinning a pursuit in either leisure or “performance-based sport participation”, and 3) a setting that facilitates “psychosocial development” and encourages the attainment of “life skills”, e.g., “discipline, commitment, and teamwork” (p. 15).

Sport participation and long-term engagement in physical activity are encouraged as they contribute to longevity and overall well-being (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; 2008). Moreover, Safai et al. (2015) affirmed, “there is persuasive data that supports the social, economic and health benefits of sport specifically (as compared to physical activity broadly)” (p. 6). Youth sport analytics suggest an increase in structured sport engagement along with leisure participation (NFHS, 2018; Rugg et al., 2021). The annual report (High School Athletics Participation Survey) for the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), noted a sharp rise in high school sport participation for the 2017-2018 year in the United States of America (USA). According to the report, American Football was the dominant sport for boys, with athletics (outdoor track and field) coming in second. Other popular sports among high school boys included: basketball, baseball, soccer, cross-country, wrestling, tennis, golf and swimming/diving (NFHS, 2018). Youth sport participation in the teenage years (13-17 years) continued to rise in some USA sport programmes, however, continued participation in sport remain uncertain due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown restrictions in various countries (The Aspen Institute, 2020).

The curator and trustee of South African sport is the Department of Sport and Recreation (SRSA). According to the 2018-2019 SRSA annual report, South Africa's sporting mantra promotes “an active and winning nation” (SRSA, 2019, p. 23). Considering this, initiatives for mass participation in sporting activities and events are prioritized in SRSA's annual action plan(s). Moreover, each year a specific sport federation is prioritized by SRSA and additional finances

and support are earmarked to enable that federation to meet specific targets (SRSA, 2019, p.7). Tennis South Africa (TSA) was the 2013/14 federation of focus, whereas Gymnastics South Africa was the focus for 2019/20. To date and to the best of my knowledge, the annual report for 2020/2021 year is not available in the public domain.

Team sport participation in South Africa draws much attention and media coverage. Odhav (2020) reported that soccer, rugby, cricket and netball are the most popular sporting codes in South Africa. Burnett's (2010) study on South African University student-athletes, showed that rugby (n = 1270), field hockey (n = 1248) and cricket (n = 748) had the most registered league players. In terms of participation popularity, tennis (n = 126) ranked second to last, with only volleyball (n = 120) having fewer registered players.

Considering various initiatives that promote mass engagement in sport across the life span, youth sport scholars remain interested in the holistic development of children in the high performance domain, specifically their long-term health (Côté & Hancock, 2016; Rongen et al., 2015; Safai et al., 2015). Competitive youth sport lends itself to a results orientated focus (the pursuit of scholarships, bursaries, medals, and winning at all costs), often to the detriment of the child's overall health and well-being (DiFiori et al., 2014; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Jayanthi et al., 2012).

The youth sport landscape has a rich and deep literature base that incorporates different perspectives to understand the young athlete, their engagement with and progression through sport (Cobley, 2016; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016). To appreciate the complexity of the youth sport athlete and the youth sport context in which they function, it is important to recognize the multiple components that influence this demographic and their relationship with sport (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). Pertinent topics within the youth sport literature include, athlete development, junior to senior transitions (career transitions), relationships with parents and coaches, the environment, decisions to continue or withdraw from sport, financial commitments, dual careers (student-athlete), deliberate play and deliberate practice, early and late specialisation, injuries, high performance and recreational sport (Cobley, 2016; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016; Vierimaa et al., 2016).

Considering the wealth of topics that comprise youth sport literature, it not surprising that there are differing views on what to prioritize when structuring programmes for the youth sport athlete. Youth sport research highlight these challenges in structuring youth sport programmes from a policy perspective (Côté & Hancock, 2016; Ford et al., 2011). Considering this, several countries have adopted various long-term athlete development approaches and / or models in an attempt to provide structure to sport participation and performance (Côté & Hancock, 2016; Ford et al., 2011). These approaches vary between countries as underlying interpretations, objectives and outcomes differ. Several of these models have been reviewed in scientific literature in an attempt to understand their empirical validity (Bailey et al., 2010; Ford et al., 2011; Vierimaa et al., 2016).

Despite the shift toward more structured development approaches in pursuit of professional sport transitions, the conversion rate from junior player to adult professional is low, with many young athletes suffering from injury and / or experiencing burnout before their potential is fully realized (Bergeron et al., 2015). Some interesting studies on tennis players have been conducted in this regard. Brouwers et al. (2012) studied 3521 competitive male and female junior tennis players in the under 14 elite category on the European tour. An analysis of overall performances led to the conclusion that for most tennis players in the younger age groups, later adult success is not associated with their earlier performance success rates. Moreover, these scholars asserted that there is “no clearly identifiable age at which all players should start to perform in order to be successful at the professional level and that it is difficult to identify an age at which performances could be used as a reliable talent selection indicator for later success” (p. 470).

Carlson’s (1988) study on Swedish junior tennis players, showed differences between the training volumes of the elite group when compared to their near-elite counterparts. The elite group accumulated fewer training hours than the near-elite group before the age of 15. The near-elite group also showed poor player-coach relationships and a higher expectation for success than their elite counterparts did. Interestingly, this early study on junior tennis players drives home a similar message to that of Brouwers et al. (2012), in that early success is not a predictor of transition to the professional tour and / or future adult success. Moreover, Carlson’s (1988) findings highlight the need for future studies to explore context and environmental factors within athlete development. Long-term development, athletic pathways and career transitions are prominent topics in sport literature (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004; Côté et al., 2005; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008;

Henriksen, 2010; Henriksen et al., 2010; Stambulova & Samuel, 2020; Walsh, 2014). Moreover, literature on sport specialisation are at the forefront of providing insight on career trajectories, dropout and retention in sport (DiFiori et al., 2014; Feeley et al., 2016; Fraser-Thomas & Wolman, 2016; Myer et al., 2015; 2016).

Two prominent specialisation pathways in sport literature are early specialisation and late specialisation. Sports where peak performance are reached before physical maturation are considered early specialisation sports. These sports typically tend to be acrobatic in nature, namely rhythmic gymnastics, figure skating and dance (Côté et al., 2007; Ford et al., 2009; Jayanthi et al., 2012). Law et al. (2007) found that rhythmic gymnasts competing at the international level were as young as 12 years old. They showed that elite gymnasts spend considerably more time in deliberate practice and intensive training when compared to their near elite counterparts. However, when the elite gymnasts were surveyed on their health, they scored lower than the near elite gymnasts and reported more injuries overall.

The late specialisation pathway is one in which athletes specialise in one sport to the exclusion of other sports during their mid to late teen years as opposed to early childhood (Côté et al., 2009; Jayanthi et al., 2013). Late specialisation, with early sampling of multiple sports before puberty, is recognised as an alternative, healthier pathway for long-term development, long-term success and transition from youth to adult sports (Côté et al., 2009; Jayanthi et al., 2009; 2011; 2012; 2013; Myer et al., 2016). Tennis is categorized as a late specialisation sport (Carlson, 1988; Feeley et al., 2016; Jayanthi et al., 2013).

Studies on specialisation models for the junior tennis player are well documented (Jayanthi et al., 2009; 2011; 2012; 2013). Jayanthi et al. (2013) suggested two models for training purposes for the development of the junior tennis player in the elite domain. The first model promotes early and specialised training in tennis alone, with progression in training intensity over time. The second model “encourages an early introduction to tennis” with continued diversification across other sporting codes while delaying tennis specialisation until “late adolescence” (p. 30). The literature on junior tennis player achievements suggest that early performance milestones (e.g., ranking) are not prerequisites or determinants for successful transitions onto the adult professional tour (Faber et al., 2016). Li et al.’s (2020) retrospective study on professional tennis players

conveyed a similar message relating to the predictability of earlier performance successes in relation to later transition and success. In short, the developing tennis player's (U18) potential for future success should not be pinned on ranking points as predictors.

Research on early and late specialisation pathways are by no means fixed in time, nor are they the only mechanisms through which to assess long-term athlete development. The debate on early and / or late specialisation is ongoing - offering new insights for consideration. One such example is a recent editorial contribution by Baker et al. (2021), which stated:

“There are obvious advantages to having a broad and diverse experience in sport and movement during youth - for both eventual high-performance athletes and lifelong sport enthusiasts. However, more research is needed. Importantly, researchers should examine the relationships between the elements of early specialization (i.e., intensity, specialization, pressure) and a range of negative outcomes (e.g., injury, dropout). Moreover, we need a balanced discussion of the possible benefits of specialization instead of this overly simplistic message of ‘specialization is bad’” (p. 179).

1.2. Literature Review

Literature reviews, according to applied research methodologists, have varied structures (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011; Gratton & Jones, 2004). This format is dependent upon the overall approach to research and the selected research design. Considering this varied approach to the literature review, my own literature review has a flexible structure due to the nature of the qualitative research design that I selected. The overall research design is qualitative, and the qualitative strategy selected is constructivist grounded theory (GT). More detail on this to follow in Chapter 2.

Constructivist GT is one of four variants of GT, with the others being Classic, Straussian, and Situational Analysis GT (Babchuk, 2011). Bryant (2017), a notable grounded theorist, suggested that an individual enter the research field with an “open mind” when trying to understand the research terrain and be “prepared to be surprised by what they find” (p. 28-29). Consequently, some grounded theorists are hesitant to conduct a vast preliminary literature review before entering the research field. This is aimed at helping them to remain unbiased throughout the

process and / or to keep their biases in check. Moreover, the early pioneers of GT, i.e., Glaser (Classic) and Strauss (Straussian), advised against entering the field with prior understanding and / or knowledge of the topic (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2006; 2014). Bryant (2017) expounded on this by stating, “these proponents [Glaser and Strauss] of Grounded Theory Method (GTM) advocated a starting point devoid as far as possible from engagement with the literature, since the knowledge of other research might influence the researchers’ engagement with the data” (p. 29). These assertions from the early pioneers has led to tension between some postgraduate research committees and researchers, especially doctoral students. Nonetheless and despite this contention, it is generally expected that Ph.D. students submit a detailed account of the planned research as well as demonstrate their familiarity with the research topic and area of interest (Bryant, 2017). GT literature reviews, the structure and placement thereof, remains an area of debate for students pursuing postgraduate studies (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2006; 2014). See Appendix I for more information on this part of my Ph.D. research journey.

Considering this tension, this section forms part of my theoretical framework that is topically oriented within youth sport literature. Topics that influenced my thinking (prior to entering the field) within the youth sport landscape were, athlete development, early and late specialisation, decisions to continue with sport or drop out, deliberate play and deliberate practice, athletic environments and social agents, i.e., coach-athlete and parent-athlete relationships. Within this broad context, my research interest and topic lay, i.e., tennis development in South African men’s tennis players. This formed part of my theoretical framework and helped guide the process of understanding the research problem at the onset. However, whilst in the field – conducting observations and then semi-structured interviews – I began to see another layer to the research topic; I then followed leads to explore this in depth – in line with the emergent and iterative nature of qualitative research. Furthermore, it must be noted that although I engaged with the literature and contemporary athlete development models, I refrained from superimposing these models on the process during data collection, data analysis and write up. The most important and recent literature, however, follows later in the dissertation when discussing the current study’s findings (See Chapter 3).

The youth sport literature notes that there are a number of research perspectives that underpin the structuring and delivery of youth sport approaches (Cobley, 2016; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016).

These include: 1) Development of expertise, which includes early and late specialization with varying levels of training loads depending upon entry and development stage; 2) Physical activity promotion, which describes the sport environment as a way to foster positive adherence to physical activity and positive, healthy behaviour throughout the life-span; and 3) Development of the person, where the sport environment is used as a way to positively develop young people – sport being the vehicle for this endeavour (Côté et al., 2007b; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015).

In addition to these lines of research, the concepts of deliberate practice and deliberate play have also been contested within the literature. These concepts are central to the discussions on skill acquisition and expert performance. Expert performance has been linked to the number of hours spent in deliberate practice activities (Baker et al., 2003; Ericsson et al., 1993). Furthermore, having insight on performance and practice activities throughout various stages of development is useful for understanding continued sport engagement and expert performance in adulthood (Coutinho et al., 2015).

The literature suggests that expert performance can be achieved through two different pathways, i.e., early specialization or early diversification. For example, in their seminal work on deliberate practice within the music domain, Ericsson et al. (1993) suggested that an early start with intentional, prolonged engagement in activities would lead to expert performance and mastery in a specific domain. The idea of an early start and prolonged engagement (with large investments of time) has greatly influenced the sport domain, specifically youth sport (Côté et al., 2007a; Côté & Hancock, 2016; Ericsson et al., 1993). Deliberate play, as described by Côté et al. (2007a), refers to “early developmental physical activities that are intrinsically motivating, provide immediate gratification, and are specifically designed to maximize enjoyment” (p. 185-186). This approach to athlete development seems to stand in contrast to the deliberate practice approach presented by Ericsson et al. (1993). Moreover, and to reiterate these contrasting views, Côté and Hancock (2016) suggested that “providing opportunities for all children to participate in various informal and organized recreational sports should be the focus of sport programmes even if developing elite athletes (e.g., those with a performance objective) is the ultimate goal of the programme” (p. 53). Early sampling and / or early diversification are terms used in conjunction with the notion of deliberate play. These terms refer to children’s exposure to and sampling of various sporting activities throughout childhood (Côté et al., 2009).

Another interesting discussion point within the youth sport landscape is the concept of the athlete environment as it pertains to development (Henriksen, 2010). The environment accommodates and facilitates development and includes role players such as the family (parents and siblings) and coaches who play key roles in this process, especially in the psychosocial domain (Côté et al., 2007b; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). The dynamic interplay between the athlete and the role players in the environment adds another layer of complexity to the facilitation of development and transitions (Henriksen, 2010; Henriksen et al., 2014). For example, Henriksen et al.'s (2014) case study on a struggling talent development environment for golf in Denmark showed that key attributes for facilitating junior to senior transitions were not present. Key attributes expected of successful talent development environments include; relationships that are supportive, training and transfer of knowledge by elite athletes functioning as role models, sport goals that are supported by broader community, development of psychosocial skills, diversification of training in other sports, prioritizing long-term development not early career performance(s), a cohesive organizational culture, and coherence and communication between key role players, i.e., school, family, sport coaches, etc. (Henriksen et al., 2014).

The topic of dropout in youth sport is well documented within the literature. Reasons for this phenomenon vary and remains a topic of debate among scholars (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; 2016). Some of the debate on this topic could also be traced to varied departure points of research exploration / investigation. For example, early work on dropout focused on “superficial reasons” for leaving sport such as lack of enjoyment (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016, p. 231). The underlining reasons for this perceived lack of enjoyment, however, was largely untapped in the early literature.

Alternatively, sport historically adopted certain motivational theories as lenses for exploring youth's interest in participating or engaging in sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016). Nonetheless, some common factors influencing dropout in youth sport (in general) are cited as coach-athlete conflicts, lack of enjoyment / fun, pressures from parents, financial investments, intense training loads, emphasis on performance outcomes, injuries, specializing in a single sport too early (lack of sampling and diversification), etc. (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016). In junior tennis, overuse injuries has been associated with burnout and quitting the sport permanently, i.e., dropout (DiFiori et al., 2014). Junior tennis studies suggest that a late specialization approach to development can help to prevent dropout (Jayanthi et al., 2009; 2011).

When examining the high performance sport environment, it is clear that the needs of the growing child, coupled with the different competitive stressors they encounter raises a plethora of questions related to their health and well-being (Russell, 2021; Safai et al., 2015; Sawczuk et al., 2018). Considering this, the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of the term health as: “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being not merely an absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 1948), has been questioned in the high performance sport domain, specifically in terms of the appropriate delivery of sport to the developing athlete (Safai et al., 2015).

Grand slam tennis champion, Rafael Nadal, eloquently underscores this sporting complexity - the dichotomy between potential health detriments and performance outcomes at the professional level: “Playing sports is a good thing for ordinary people; sport played at the professional level is not good for your health. It pushes your body to limits that human beings are not naturally equipped to handle” (Nadal & Carlin, 2011, p.12). These sentiments or concerns are echoed within youth sport literature. In short, physical activity programmes and sport could potentially provide health benefits, however, the competitive and performance orientated landscape of youth sport may simultaneously jeopardise the health of the growing child (Baker et al., 2015). Sport and the structure thereof is seen as a mechanism for children to be socialized within society (Côté & Hay, 2002). Considering this, discussions relating to the purpose of engagement and best practices within structuring sport programs for the developing child is important.

Career transitions, athlete development approaches and models, and growth and maturation form part of the broader youth sport landscape and will be discussed below. Additionally, an overview on tennis within the context of a global sport is presented.

1.2.1. Career transitions: Sport transitions within life transitions and critical moments of development

Career transition research has a rich history outside of sport. Within sport, the topic of career termination and / or retirement has ignited research and discussions on the transitions after sport and the experiences of athletes within this phase of their careers; the origins of which can be traced to thanatology (the study of death and practices around it) and social gerontology theoretical models (Lavalley, 2000; Stambulova et al., 2021). Just over a decade ago, the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) published their position statement on athletic career development and

transitions (Stambulova et al., 2009). This statement has since been revised due to its popularity and the need to update content and practical recommendations for both researchers and practitioners invested in this topic (Stambulova et al., 2021). Why is the career transition topic relevant to the youth sport athlete and junior tennis player since they are not in the retirement phase? Career transition research is broad, but can be contextualised and understood within the youth sport landscape as well (Dunn & Tamminen, 2021; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016). To date, transition research in sport has accommodated the youth sport athlete in their movement/transitions and / or development across the life span. Popular transition research topics include transitions out of sport, dual career athletes (e.g., the balance of sport with other pursuits) and junior to senior transitions (e.g., Dunn & Tamminen, 2021; Knights et al., 2016; Stambulova et al., 2021).

To understand the youth sport landscape in which the junior tennis player resides, it is important to dissect the process of transitions relating to decision-making within these environments. Athletes do not grow and develop along linear paths, nor do they transition in and out of their athletic careers in a vacuum, devoid of their social and familial relationships and environments (Lavalley, 2000; Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004; Wylleman et al., 2015). For example, in Fraser-Thomas et al.'s (2016) review of youth sport literature, the term drop off is introduced to the discussion on development pathways. This term sheds light on a host of factors associated with sport transitions, not just sport termination or dropout / withdrawal. Furthermore, and to expound on the complexity denoted by the term dropping off, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2016) presented two models that accommodate this concept within sport transitions:

1. Developmental Perspective on Transitions Faced by Athletes (DPTFA), and
2. Development Model of Sport Participation (DMSP).

Both models accommodate dropping off within their various development and movement phases. The DPTFA model, however, expounds upon various stages of sport transitions and accommodates other elements within these transitions and at varying levels, such as “athletic, psychological, psychosocial, and academic / vocational” factors (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004, p. 520). This well-rounded approach to sport transitions recognises the dynamic and cyclic interplay of people moving through sport at different intensities and during different phases of life. Moreover, it accommodates the natural progression(s) of growing up within sport and moving

into the senior phase from a junior career. In addition, “non-normative” progressions such as unexpected injuries, illness or not being selected are accommodated within this model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004, p. 509).

The DMSP describes three stages related to participation in sport: sampling, specializing and investment (Côté, 1999; Côté & Hancock, 2016). The DMSP model is known for its emphasis on sport sampling and deliberate play in early childhood and deliberate practice in the specializing and investment years. Moreover, the DMSP also accommodates the recreational sport participant who has no aspirations of heading into the elite performance pathway (Vierimaa et al., 2016). Three trajectories within sport are outlined within the DMSP model: 1) sampling for recreational sport participation, 2) sampling for elite involvement in sport, and 3) early specialization in sport for elite involvement (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016). Participant transitions between these trajectories are also acknowledged within the DMSP model. For example, a sport participant could decide to move from the recreational trajectory to elite involvement. It is also understood that participants could decide to withdraw from engagement altogether and transition out of sport. However, early specialization in sport is the trajectory most associated with dropout (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016).

The ISSP’s revised position statement on career transitions, highlight transitions within two categories; one being the “life domain” and the other “transition predictability” (Stambulova et al., 2021, p. 4). The life domain has three pivotal focus areas: athletic, non-athletic and dual career. The athletic focus area consists of the junior to senior transitions in sport; this context is important as we unpack the step-by-step development and transitions in junior tennis.

In their review of the sport transition literature, Wylleman et al. (2015) revealed that transitions in the athletic careers of athletes are complex. They include multiple mini transitions within the sport domain, but also in the broader life domain, which inevitably influences sport/athletic careers and decision-making in this area. Considering this and linking with Wylleman and Lavallee’s (2004) earlier work on sport transitions, there remains a call for a holistic approach to understand the athlete across the life span. In other words, there is need for a multi-faceted conceptual framework to accommodate the dynamic nature of growing up in the sporting context.

1.2.2. Reflections on development approaches within youth sport

Howard et al. (2019) asserted that the process of long-term athlete development is a “cradle to grave” approach and should be viewed and understood in this context (p. 124.). To understand the complexity of the youth sport landscape, one must first grapple with and understand children / the developing child and then appropriately accommodate them in sport. Thanks to the advancement of paediatric exercise science, children today are not viewed as miniature adults. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) has categorized children as a special populations group. Therefore, guidelines for physical activity and exercise are underpinned by this classification (Pescatello et al., 2014). What practical implications does this have for the sport practitioner, parent and / or guardian? A good starting point would be safeguarding the youth sport athlete by means of promoting health, well-being and reducing injuries (Baker et al., 2015; Howard et al., 2019; Jayanthi et al., 2020).

Howard et al. (2019) suggested that providing a framework for long-term athlete development could assist with assuring the health of the youth sport athlete. Howard et al. (2019) posit the Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD) as one such framework to meet this outcome. Considering the sport of tennis for example, the junior player – playing a technical racquet sport – needs to be understood and safeguarded within the context of the developing child in sport. Some injury related studies were mentioned in the previous section, but one recent study by Jayanthi et al. (2020) sheds light on the developing youth sport athlete and their susceptibility to injury with increases in training intensity. This work reminds us of the injury risks associated with increased training load, intensity and year round training in one sport (sport specialisation), among the developing athlete (7-18 years). Although an agreed upon definition of sport specialisation is an ongoing debate, this longitudinal clinical study, suggests that early sport specialisation increases the risk of injury in the young athlete, specifically overuse injuries. Moreover, they make a cautionary call for youth sport practitioners to take heed of this risk before developing and implementing overly structured and intensive training programmes for growing children and adolescents (Jayanthi et al., 2020).

There has been considerable interest in getting more people active and more people playing sport as a way to mobilise an active lifestyle. Consequently, children entering sport has raised questions and discussions on the health benefits, overall purpose and outcomes of youth sport programmes

(Bruner et al., 2021; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2015; Holt & Neely, 2011). In the South African context, promoting an active lifestyle through sport is an ongoing topic of interest facilitated at national government level through the Department of Sport and Recreation (SRSA). This is specifically noted in its policy for Sport and Recreation nationally, i.e., the white paper on Sport and Recreation for the Republic of South Africa (SRSA, 2012). At national level, sport in South African society is seen as a vehicle for positive change and an avenue to a “better life” for all (SRSA, 2012, p. 25). These discussions at national level coincide with the views of sport and its potential health and societal benefits (Jacobs et al., 2019; Safai et al., 2015; SRSA, 2012; 2019).

Structured sport as a vehicle for children to be active and maintain their physical activity for health and well-being across the lifespan has been a hot topic in development and sport psychology literature (Bailey et al., 2010; Baker et al., 2015; Bruner et al., 2021; Côté & Hancock, 2016; Holt & Neely, 2011). Moreover, as briefly touched on in this chapter, there are differing views around the purpose and outcomes for youth sport and the structures thereof. In other words, for what reason should children be involved in sport and to what extent should their involvement in sport be structured? (Côté et al., 2005; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; 2016; Holt & Neely, 2011).

Considering the varied approaches and lines of reasoning underpinning youth sport literature, an interesting topic which stands in contrast to a reductionist and performance based approach to development is Positive Youth Development (PYD) (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). PYD is not a structured model, but rather a concept underpinning the development of youth within the sport domain – sport being the mechanism through which young people are positively developed. The sport environment is regarded as a platform to provide rich learning and development opportunities for young people. Rooted in positive psychology, PYD’s approach to development recognises the multi-faceted, non-reductionist approach to the human experience. Adolescence has been viewed historically by some to be a time of uncertainty marked by conflict and misbehaviour. Considering this, PYD is positioned as a positive lens to view young people with potential that could be shaped and developed, not problems needing to be fixed (Holt & Neely, 2011; Holt et al., 2020).

Contextualised to the sport domain, PYD is not exclusively used to foster the development of elite athletes, but rather to develop people through the sport environment (Holt & Neely, 2011). The

sport environment presents a variety of reference points and opportunities for acquiring the skills needed to function as a well-rounded, contributing member of society. For example, the interactions within the coach-athlete relationship presents learning opportunities related to positive role modelling, effective communication skills, and goal setting, to name a few. Despite the numerous benefits presented through a PYD approach to the sport environment, a cautionary call must be heeded when viewing the sport domain. Viewing the sport domain as only positive would be a generalization and misrepresentation (Holt & Neely, 2011). Considering this, adopting a PYD approach to development in theory without fully and critically evaluating the sport environment, including oneself as a sport practitioner, could be a limitation affecting its practical application. Taking this a step further and applying it to the South African context of mass sport participation, simply applying a PYD approach to development and using sport as a vehicle, could be a limitation in communities where infrastructure and resources are lacking. A strength of applying a PYD approach to a South African context, however, could be seen in the motivation and commitment of South Africans – individually and as a collective – to overcome incredible odds through sport.

Employing a PYD lens to the youth sport discussion can be viewed as counterintuitive considering the emphasis in the literature on expertise, performance, athlete development models and junior to senior transitions (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). It is, therefore, important to recognize that when engaging with the literature, one must understand the lines of research and methodologies underpinning the varied approaches to development and the subsequent outcomes thereof. In other words, what is the purpose and end goal of participating in sport as a young person, i.e., to become an expert performer, a recreational sport participant, life-long physical activity participant, etc. (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; 2008; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Rongen et al., 2015). Some contemporary development approaches and models that have influenced discussions in youth sport literature are presented below.

1.2.2.1. Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD)

The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model is a popular approach to athlete development (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004). Although favoured among some sport practitioners and widely implemented in sporting nations, including South Africa, the LTAD has been, in some respects, weighed, measured and found wanting in contemporary sport psychology and

developmental literature (Bailey et al., 2010; Ford et al., 2011; Vierimaa et al., 2016). The criticism is aimed at the LTAD's empirical underpinnings for its approach to development (Bailey et al., 2010; Ford et al., 2011; Vierimaa et al., 2016). Specifically, the contention (in its original form) lies within its linear display of the chronological age-stage approach to development and appears almost regimented, mechanical and reductionist due to lacking a holistic perspective on development, i.e., lacking in psychological and psychosocial elements in development for example (Vierimaa et al., 2016). The LTAD model is known for its use in athlete development and performance settings in particular and is currently used in South African sporting codes. Tennis South Africa's (TSA) adapted version of this model is the long-term player development (LTPD) model (TSA, 2014). A limitation of this approach to development in a South African tennis context, is its lack of attention to the individual experiences of the tennis player as well as the influence of the environment on development, i.e., familial, social, school and team sport (TSA, 2014). Another criticism of the LTAD is its lack of context to the stages of development that athletes are expected to pass through. In other words, there are varied rates and variation in preparedness to an individual's movement through development, i.e., biological maturation as well as psychological and psychosocial elements. In this respect, the LTAD does not accommodate for these individual differences in athlete development. However, there are positives in having a reference point, like the LTAD model, for development in youth sport. For example, Bailey et al. (2010) noted the strengths of LTAD were its ability to "advance practitioner knowledge to some degree" (p. 1). In addition, as Bailey et al. (2010) suggested, the LTAD does not emphasise early specialisation in sport but encourages a "balanced training" approach for the youth sport athlete (p. 1).

1.2.2.2. Developmental Perspective on Transitions Faced by Athletes (DPTFA)

The Developmental Perspective on Transitions Faced by Athletes (DPTFA) is a model that adopts a holistic approach to development and recognizes the non-linearity of athletic transition (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Moreover, the DPTFA accommodates the longevity of a career within the broader life span context. The athlete continues living and progressing through life and is not confined to the sport domain. This view acknowledges the life of the athlete that transcends sport and the appropriate adjustments needed once retired from sport (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman et al., 2015). Throughout the course of the athlete's career, multiple transitions are experienced, both in sport and outside of sport, i.e., the broader life context. These transitions

are not mutually exclusive nor are they occurring in a linear, parallel path, but are dynamic and influence each other. A strength of the DPTFA model is its recognition of the athlete/person development and their multiple transitions that extend across the lifespan (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Wylleman et al., 2015). Another strength is seen in the model's evolution and adaptability over time. To remain current with research on transitions, the DPTFA model was expounded upon in the form of the Holistic Athletic Career model. The adapted version has arguably, remained current with research trends and insights within transition literature (Wylleman et al., 2015).

The Holistic Athletic Career model further accommodates for the “nature and types of transitions athletes” could encounter throughout the course of their sporting careers, for example, “stages of initiation, development, mastery and discontinuation” (Wylleman et al., 2015, p. 102). While the multi-faceted and holistic approach to athlete career transitions is a major strength of the DPTFA model, a limitation can be seen in its inability to accommodate for individual experiences of non-transitioning athletic careers. This may be due, in part, to the subjective nature and unpredictability of non-transitioning athletic experiences, specifically in the junior to senior phase. The complexity of this transition phase is noted in Andronikos et al.'s (2019) study on the unsuccessful transitions of athletes, with particular interest on the athletes' view of this transition phase. The junior to senior transition is deemed a challenging phase in athletic progression; dropout is most likely to occur in this phase (Stambulova et al., 2009). Andronikos et al. (2019) qualitatively interviewed six Greek athletes who all dropped out of sport during the junior to senior phase transition. Their findings revealed that athletes' decision to drop out of sport cannot be linked to one factor, but to several factors, some of which are subjective. For example, a major theme of the study was “lack of communication and support towards athlete well-being”, which showed that athletes relied heavily on support and open lines of communication from their coaches, especially when seeking advice/feedback for making informed decisions. Dismissive and / or command style approaches in the coach-athlete relationship was seen to negatively affect athletes and their future planning (Andronikos et al., 2019. p. 204).

Applied to the South African sport environment, the DPTFA model provides a multi-layered context to an athlete's progression and development in sport, which is useful in understanding the complexity of transitions. However, each sport code presents unique challenges that the DPTFA model does not specifically accommodate. Tennis, for example, as a popular global sport, fades

in popularity when compared to dominant team sports in South Africa, such as rugby, cricket and soccer (Odhav, 2020). It would be interesting to see what more could be learned about athlete transitions if the DPTFA model was applied to specific South African sport codes and accommodated for competing sport interests at school and club level.

1.2.2.3 Development Model of Sport Participation (DMSP)

The Development Model of Sport Participation (DMSP) is a well-known evidence based approach to development (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007; Vierimaa et al., 2016). The DMSP accommodates for both the recreational and elite sport participant (Vierimaa et al., 2016). This model is underpinned and supported by the concepts of early sampling and / or diversification of sporting interests along with the enjoyment of participation in sport and activities – the end goal does not necessarily mean elite sport. The DMSP is a working model that accommodates the movements and transitions within the sport and athletic development process. Not all entrants into the processes within the model are expected to linearly transition through each stage at set times and / or rates. Moreover, the primary focus is not on talent development, but rather the development of active, skilful participants accommodated in a healthy, fun-filled sporting environment. If, through these environments (and / or stages), an elite athletic star emerges, then this is considered a by-product, not the primary purpose (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016; Vierimaa et al., 2016).

Some of the strengths of the DMSP in comparison to the LTAD model is its flexible nature concerning development and the inclusion of the recreational sport participant. It also acknowledges that its trajectory of early specialization for elite involvement is associated with dropout from sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016). Considering this, a limitation of this model could be its lack of prescriptive measures for sport practitioners and policy makers who are looking for more practical guidelines, rather than merely anecdotal recommendations. The DMSP could be a viable approach to development in a South African sport environment as it accommodates for and encourages mass participation in sport - mass participation and being physically active are goals in the South African mantra for an active nation (SRSA, 2019). On the other hand, its non-prescriptive stages/trajectory could pose an obstacle for South African practitioners wanting to translate theory to practice for their specific athlete and / or sport code.

1.2.2.4. Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE)

The Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) model is an ecological approach to development that recognises the athlete in the context of their broader environment. The ATDE is rooted in theoretical foundations of “systems theory, ecological psychology, and cultural perspectives” (Henriksen, 2010, p. 39). A strength of the ATDE model is its recognition of the dynamic interplay between the person and their environment – both being active role players in the process of development and both evolving over time. According to Henriksen (2010), the environment in which the athlete resides and functions is a pivotal system and / or mechanism for developing athletes and assists their progression from junior to senior level. Another strength of the ATDE model is its recognition of the environment as fulfilling dual roles in the athlete’s development – athletic domain and non-athletic domain. Furthermore, the model is divided into the micro and macro level. The environment, where the athlete resides and is most influential on development, is positioned in the micro level. The macro level pertains to the social dynamic where “culture and customs” are deemed to influence development in a broader sense (Henriksen et al., 2010, p. 213). These categories suggest that movements/progressions of the athlete over time are not confined to the athletic environment, but influencers outside the athletic environment are just as important for holistic development. Moreover, the environment is suggested to have a past, present and future influence on the athlete as it evolves over time.

When applied to a South African sporting context, the ATDE model could be a useful lens as it moves the attention away from the individual athlete and credits the environment for its influence on development. This could be seen as both a strength and limitation of the model. The socioeconomic status of South African individuals, families and communities would be accommodated for in this approach to development, which could be considered a strength. However, a limitation could be that personal responsibility and intrinsic motivation is overlooked and underrepresented in the development process. This may be embedded in a systems approach, as Systems Theory over time and across disciplines has traditionally neglected the individual perspective. Moreover, the concept of talented athlete portrayed in the model gives rise to a plethora of questions. For example, this could present some challenges for sport practitioners tasked with the role of deciphering what variables in talent selection constitute talent. This is regarded as an ongoing challenge in the youth sport landscape, i.e., selection and deselection of young athletes (Rongen et al., 2015).

Considering the approaches to development presented above, it is evident that there are varied schools of thought and consequently varied approaches to structuring the development of the youth sport athlete (Bailey et al., 2010; Balyi & Hamilton, 2004; Côté et al., 2005; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; 2016). Moreover, when theoretically and generically applied to a South African context without fully understanding the environment and / or specific sporting code, these models could cause more harm than good. It is imperative then, that when considering the youth sport development landscape, researchers, policy makers and practitioners do so with rigor, care and tact. In any respect, placing emphasis on the holistic development of the person in the sport environment is paramount when considering and implementing a development framework. Contextualising it thereafter to a specific environment (country, culture and specific sport) is key.

1.2.3. Growth and maturation

Another important dimension to the discussion on development is in the area of growth and maturation. In a recent review of the literature relating to growth and maturation of the junior tennis player, Brito (2020) draws attention to the complexity of growing up and maturing in tennis as children pass through the expected human developmental stages at varied rates. This process is more individualized or personalized than generalised to a collective of growing children. This is due to the interplay and complexity of biological maturity and chronological age. In junior tennis, players are grouped by chronological age in competition. This presents challenges for young competitors as they may compete in the same chronological age group category with competitors at different stages of biological maturity.

Van den Berg et al.'s (2006) study on South African tennis players in the girls under 14 age group highlights this complexity. They investigated the relationships between biological maturation, motor performance and talent identification. All players ($n = 25$) between the chronological ages of 12 and 14 years completed a test battery for motor performances along with the biological maturation identification questionnaire (BMIQ). The BMIQ was used to categorize the participants into three development categories: early maturers, average maturers and late maturers. Categories were based upon the participants' responses on the BMIQ. For example, early maturing girls reach the age of menarche or peak height velocity (PHV) – determinants for maturity – a year before girls in the average age category (expected onset of puberty). Late maturing girls' progress through these stages after the average age group – as many as one or

more years after (Van den Berg et al., 2006). Their results showed that early maturing players scored better on tests of the upper body compared to the average and late maturing groups. However, the average and late maturing girls generally outperformed the early maturing group on “tennis specific, physical and motor tests” (p. 286). Based upon their findings, they suggested that biological maturation components be included in the talent identification and development process of junior tennis players. Without this context, late maturing players may be overlooked / deselected in the tennis development process.

Myburgh et al.’s (2016) study on growth and maturation characteristics in British junior tennis players ($n = 91$), boys and girls, between the ages of 8 and 17 years also noted the complexity of biological maturity and its effects in age group junior tennis. Anthropometric data was collected and skeletal age was assessed using a radiograph of the “left hand wrist” (p. 1958). Growth and maturation data were then compared to national population norms. The results of the male cohort indicated that, on average, junior players between 14 and 16 years were more advanced in their skeletal age when compared to population norms. Based upon the variation of growth and maturation characteristics in junior tennis players, it is recommended that caution be taken when selecting or deselecting players based upon their physical attributes. Furthermore, Myburgh et al. (2016) suggested that players might capitalise on their physical attributes of power, speed, height, etc. and neglect the other technical and tactical requirements of the sport. The technical and tactical components of the game are important ingredients for longevity and continued improvement from the junior to senior transition.

This then, takes the long-term development discussion in sport, to another level of complexity (Brito, 2020; Hill et al., 2021; Myburgh et al., 2016). Empirical evidence making a case for the inclusion of biological maturation components in the junior tennis player discussion brings into question the current long-term development framework for South African Tennis, known as Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) (TSA, 2014). Based upon the aforementioned context, it would appear that there is deficiency in the LTPD model’s interpretation and implementation in its current form. The chronological age-stage approach of the LTPD model is outdated and does not accommodate biological maturation differences in age group tennis categories (Brito, 2020; Hill et al., 2021; Myburgh et al., 2016; TSA, 2014; Van den Berg et al., 2006).

Considering the complexity of the developing child in sport, specifically the developing junior tennis player, a long-term athlete development framework that recognises the dynamic interplay of the development stages and transitions from childhood to adolescence to adulthood (biological maturation, chronological age and growth) should be considered. Furthermore, additional empirical investigation is warranted to develop future (holistic) approaches / frameworks that sport practitioners can understand and apply to their respective sporting code(s), i.e., tennis (Brito, 2020; Myburgh et al., 2016).

1.2.4. Tennis: A global sport

Tennis has evolved since its humble beginnings as a racquet sport played in 19th century England (IOC, 2017). The year 1968 marked the end of tennis' amateur status and its professional status gave rise to the modern game of heavy hitting, intense training and competition accompanied by year round events and travel. Considering this, tennis is recognised as a sport that places substantial physical demands on the body. Players are, therefore, required to prioritise training, conditioning and recovery in order to prepare for their time on the court (Kovacs et al., 2007).

Outside of the governing bodies of professional tennis – the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) for men and the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) for women – tennis is also an Olympic sport. As an Olympic sport, it is represented in three categories in the Olympic Games structure; able bodied, Paralympic and, youth Olympic Games. In its professional capacity on the men's and women's tour, four major championship events are played each year. These are known as Grand Slams, namely, the Australian Open, the French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open. Due to the professional nature of tennis, not every tennis player has access or can gain entry to these Grand Slam events. Players ranked outside of the ATP and WTA top 500 players need to qualify for these events and players under 14 years old are considered ineligible to compete (ITF, 2020). Tennis in the entry events, such as ITF Futures and Challengers, attract several aspiring players from around the world hoping to make the leap into professional tennis. Playing these entry-level tournaments, played year round, are considered tough on the players trying to make it. In addition, these tournaments are outside of the glitz and glamour of the televised bigger events. South Africa plays host to some of the entry-level tennis tournaments, including ITF Futures and Challenger events. Players play these tournaments for prize money along with trying to improve their ranking and for entry into the bigger tournaments on the ATP and WTA tour.

In recent years, the sport of tennis has experienced an evolution in the way it is played (Kovacs et al., 2007; Moreno-Pérez et al., 2021). The high-octane game with big serves, unconventional swinging volleys, and fast movement patterns, has become more demanding on the body – especially the body of the junior player (Moreno-Pérez et al., 2021). Professional players are experiencing a longer lifespan in the game than in years gone by; however, the professional entry age has remained relatively stable – 23 years for men and 21 years for women (Moreno-Pérez et al., 2021). Considering this, and in view of the increasing physical demands placed on the body, players who want to make it onto the professional tour need to prioritize their fitness and conditioning for the sport (Kovacs et al., 2007).

Reducing injuries and keeping players healthy has become a key component for entry into professional tennis and in sustaining a professional career (Kovacs et al., 2007; Moreno-Pérez et al., 2021). Research on the junior tennis player suggests that there is a need to monitor the workload demands placed on the growing child as well as to implement appropriate recovery strategies. Workload monitoring provides insight into adaptability to load and injury pre-cursors and/or pre-disposition thereto. Moreover, factors such as age, experience level and training exclusively for tennis may affect injury susceptibility (Moreno-Pérez et al., 2021). When working with the junior tennis player, an understanding of the types of workload exerted and timing of such load is paramount in reducing injuries. Investigating the acute: chronic workload ratio (ACWR) revealed an association between “acute workload and injury risk” in junior tennis players within the high performance setting (p. 1221).

Staying with the topic of tennis injuries, Abrams et al.’s (2012) review on musculoskeletal injury, reported a correlation between the “volume of play and injury risk” in competitive players (p. 496). Furthermore, the review suggests the prevalence of more acute injuries in the lower extremity, whereas overuse injuries were more common in the upper extremity. Likewise, Plum et al. (2016) investigated injury and illness concerns in 73 competitive junior tennis players (boys and girls) in the Netherlands. The most common health problem in this cohort were overuse injuries, specifically to the lower back, shoulder and knee. Alarming findings from this study was that approximately 1 out of 8 players played with pain every week, and that about 1 in 12 players had to adapt or reduce their training or could not play at all. Due to the high injury rates observed in competitive junior tennis players, more research is warranted on appropriate levels of training

and competition volumes for the reduction of injuries and enhancing long-term success (Abrams et al., 2012; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Pluim et al., 2016).

Studies have also provided insight into various health considerations, not just those that are injury related. One such example is Lewis et al.'s (2017) study, on emotional experiences in the developing tennis player during competitive match play. This study demonstrated how pressures and performance outcomes (or expectations) influenced the emotional state of the developing athlete and revealed various coping strategies used in regulating their emotions. Staying with competitive junior tennis, Jayanthi et al.'s (2013) review, offered recommendations for promoting health and reducing injuries related to match play and tournament settings. These include: 1) players should consider extended rest periods after the fourth match on same day tournaments, and 2) older junior players are strongly urged to consider the continuation of play all together after the fourth match due to the association of injury risk in prolonged match play. Regarding the scheduling of tournaments, they suggest that players in the under 18 category should play less than 18 tournaments annually to reduce medical withdrawal and injuries.

In South Africa, tennis is a popular individual sport with a dense, competitive junior following (TSA, 2021). The modified tennis structure, introduced by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) in 2011, has attracted many young prospective tennis players across the country to the sport. The Western Cape, a South African Province renowned for its sporting prowess, has a good competitive school system and competitive academy system where the developing players are training and competing at a high level (TSA, 2021). Interestingly, South African junior tennis players are not making the transition from the competitive, elite junior tour to the professional tour. Currently, South African men's tennis has four professional tennis players represented on the ATP professional tour, namely: Kevin Anderson, Lloyd Harris, Raven Klaasen and Ruan Roelofse. So, where are our South African tennis players going after high school? For some tennis players, tennis migration is the answer. In other words, players are going where the tennis is. The collegiate tennis pathway in the United States of America (USA) is a noted pathway for aspiring tennis players from around the world, including South Africa (NCAA, 2021; Parrish et al., 2020). This pathway offers a chance to play semi-professional tennis along with a four-year University degree, partially or fully funded by an athletic scholarship (bursary). So, what is happening with

the other South African tennis players not migrating for tennis? This study presents an explanation of the development and transition processes in South African men's tennis (See Chapter 3).

1.3. Research Problem

Considering the multifaceted landscape of youth sport and the various lines of research underpinning approaches to sport participation, long-term development and career transitions, it is important to contextualize these approaches to specific sporting nations and sporting codes. South African men's tennis is no exception. Within this context, and to the best of my knowledge, there is a gap in the literature exploring the development and transition processes of South African men's tennis players. In particular their journeys from childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. The Western Cape Province has a robust and competitive junior tennis structure with several players holding a national ranking (TSA, 2021). However, after completing their junior careers the majority of players' trajectories and factors influencing these trajectories are unknown. This gap in understanding unearths a host of questions around the nuances and complexities of tennis transitions for South African men's tennis players. Without an in-depth exploration of these nuances, premature and misleading conclusions may be drawn, e.g., assuming that South African men's tennis players are quitting the sport, whilst they may merely be transitioning into other pathways.

1.4. Purpose Statement

This Grounded Theory (GT) study explored South African men's tennis player transition processes within and out of the professional player pathway. This central phenomenon was explored within the Western Cape Province in South Africa. A GT approach was utilized, both as a qualitative strategy and as a way of collecting and analysing data. At the proposal stage of the study, the central phenomenon was the process of dropout, i.e., the decision to quit the elite professional pathway and not transition into professional tennis. Once in the field, the emergent and iterative qualitative research design, i.e., constructivist grounded theory, provided opportunities to follow leads and gain a deeper understanding of the tennis player's worlds and developmental experiences. A total GT methodology was followed both in the research process and as strategy to generate theory. In doing so, a theoretical **interpretation** and **explanation** of tennis player transitions within and out of the professional pathway was generated.

1.4.1. Research Question(s)

The central question for this exploratory study was:

1. What is happening in the development process of a promising competitive junior men's tennis player from the Western Cape, South Africa?

The sub-questions were:

1. What is happening [on and off the court] in the development of these players?
2. What are the transitional processes throughout the junior to senior career pathway and how do we understand these transitions?
3. How do men's tennis players [with a promising national junior ranking] transition out of the professional player pathway?

1.5. Motivation for the Study

Youth sport literature, as seen throughout this chapter, is inundated with research and reflections in which the young, developing individual is identified as the athlete (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004; Côté et al., 2005; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Henriksen, 2010; Henriksen et al., 2010; Stambulova & Samuel, 2020; Walsh, 2014). Iconic visual displays are prominent on the pages of youth sport texts, depicting the athlete and various athletic development models. Both the athlete and athlete development models seem to reside somewhat neatly within their systems, linear continuum and / or trajectory. Such visual representations are tremendously insightful for building upon our theoretical knowledge, creating meaning and guiding future research endeavours.

However, in our attempt to understand and describe the athlete and their environment(s), have we not confined our description of retrospective events, such as sport participation, development, career transitions etc. to the sport context? In doing so, are we not limiting our scope of interpretation (qualitative designs) and / or projection (quantitative designs) of their past, present and future (athletic) selves along with their transitioning and non-transitioning sporting careers? In other words, is the person and athlete not portrayed as mutually exclusive? Have we, as researchers, limited our scope of research inquiry by compartmenting the person and athlete into two separate worlds that do not interact?

Considering this, the motivation for this study was to extend our understanding of the experiences of South African men's tennis players, i.e., the person within the sport. This pursuit was guided by a resounding grounded theorist's question: *What is happening here?* Applying this question to the sport of tennis in South Africa, it could read: What is altering the trajectory and transitions out of professional tennis, and is this process confined to the tennis and sport context? In addition, could a collision with the life context, i.e., the process of growing up alter this trajectory and subsequently influence a non-professional (tennis) transition? Wrestling with these questions, unearths the complexity of tennis development in the context of the human experience, in this case the human experience of the young (men's) tennis player growing up in the southern tip of Africa.

Through a qualitative exploration of tennis development and transitional journeys (stories), this study will contribute to a better understanding of current occurrences and practices in the South African men's tennis landscape, specifically within the Western Cape Province. It is hoped that generating a theoretical interpretation and explanation for South African men's tennis development, will encourage more studies to be undertaken, expounding upon current findings to prevent overuse injuries, burnout, dropout, and ultimately improving the quality of long-term tennis development practices delivered to our tennis players. The expectation is that the promotion of health and well-being could underpin and guide this delivery in the Western Cape and South Africa in the future.

1.6. Overview of Methodology

The study followed an exploratory design using a GT qualitative research strategy. GT, from a constructivist perspective, suggests that the emerging explanations for the central phenomenon studied are grounded in the data. In other words, the findings are grounded in the views of the participants. Generating a grand or higher-level theory was not the intended purpose of the study, but rather an **interpretation** and **explanation** of the processes of transitioning within and out of the professional tennis player pathway in men's tennis players in the Western Cape. For a detailed explanation of the methodology (sampling strategies, participants, data collection, data analysis, etc.) utilised in this study, please refer to Chapter 2 (Methodology).

1.7. Summary

South African men's tennis development and transition processes are nuanced and complex. To view this in a reductionist and linear trajectory, without considering the subjective experiences of the individual together with the collective, is to minimize the duality of the human experience within the tennis development environment, i.e., person first and tennis player second. Furthermore, by recognising and appreciating the athlete voice in this process is a pivotal step in understanding the extraordinary, layered world in which they inhabit and play.

Athlete development approaches are useful in providing much needed reference and context to the athlete, their growth, their transitions and their relationship to their environments. Recognising and accommodating the growing child in the sport domain is an important starting point for any approach to development. With the increasing demands of the sport environment, research is needed to investigate the changing landscape and the needs of the young athlete, both in their sport and broader life domain. The non-linearity of athlete development and transitions has become more apparent with the advancement of research in this area. An example of this was highlighted by the evolution of the contemporary models / approaches over time – each perspective presenting a unique element on development, and over time, the others building on previous knowledge and adding more layers of insight and complexity. When considering the South African tennis player and their development, more layers could be recognised or considered in their tennis journey, i.e., playing an individual sport and doing so on the Southern tip of Africa. More on these and other unique insights on the individual tennis player journeys / pathways will be presented in Chapter 3. Next, attention will shift to the methodology employed in the study.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Overview of the research process

Two questions arise; what is research and how does one start the research process? The term research has varied definitions depending on the textbooks that one consult (Gratton & Jones, 2004). These scholars define research as “a systematic process of discovery and advancement of human knowledge” (p. 5). They provide further clarification on this definition by suggesting that through this systematic investigative process the researcher seeks to “answer a question” (p. 5). Creswell (2009) identified and described specific systematic steps in the research process that, when followed, yield the desired outcome of a rigorous research study. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) summarised these research steps, irrespective of the selected research design, in the following order: Identify the problem, review of the literature, write a purpose statement, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, reporting and evaluating.

Distinct approaches to answering research questions and undertaking the research process is well understood in research methodology literature (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Quantitative approaches to research is largely a 20th century idea - Durkheim’s Rules of the Sociological Method (1898), a milestone in launching this movement - whereas its rival successor and now contemporary, qualitative research, gained momentum and became popular as a rigorous and viable approach to research in the latter part of the 20th and early 21st century. Mixed methods research, although relatively new, is also gaining ground as a viable and rigorous form of inquiry (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; 2018). It is suggested, however, that the seemingly dichotomous stance on research methodology, research design(s) and research strategies, namely: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, are not as polar as once believed (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), a research project leans more toward either qualitative than quantitative or vice versa. Mixed methods studies use both quantitative and qualitative research strategies in order to understand the central phenomenon and to answer the research questions in a more holistic manner, merging the data being a distinct and valuable attribute of this research design (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; 2018).

Considering the information on research methodology, how would I, as a Ph.D. student, begin the research process, especially when, from the outset, there appears to be multiple directions that I could pursue? Some research methodologists suggest that several elements should be considered

before embarking on the research journey (Creswell 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; 2018; Gratton & Jones, 2004; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One of the first key components of designing a research project is to identify one's philosophical worldview. In other words, (introspectively) identify how you, as the primary researcher, approach the idea of knowledge, consequently the pursuit of knowledge and then how you apply this to understanding the world around you. Terminology that is widely used in the early stages of designing a research study are ontology and epistemology. Gratton and Jones (2004) provide a concise definition for both these terms. Ontology is defined as the “study of the philosophy of knowledge and epistemology is defined as the philosophical study of how such knowledge is acquired” (p. 14).

Creswell (2009) uses the term worldview in the research context as an umbrella term to articulate and define “a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds” (p. 6). Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) use the term worldview as opposed to paradigm to denote a broader spectrum of beliefs held by researchers, which are not necessarily associated with a specific research discipline. Following the identification of the philosophical underpinning of a research study, the researcher sets out to design a study in a congruent manner (Babchuk, 2019). The figure below summarises and depicts the systematic process of designing a study.

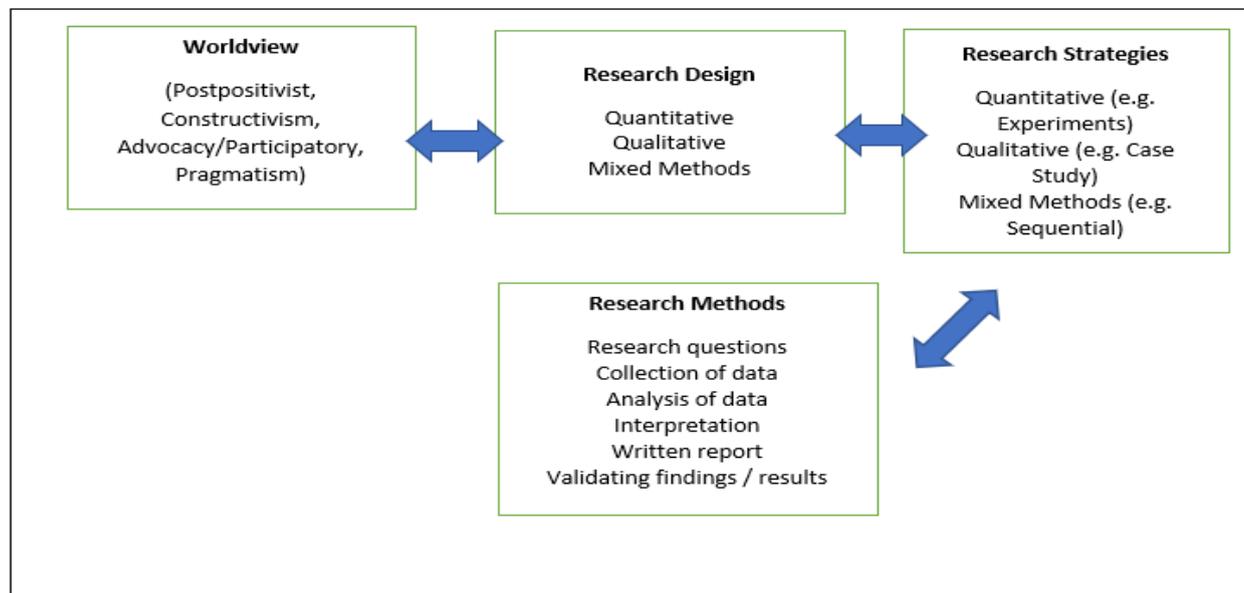


Figure 2.1. The systematic research process (adapted from Creswell, 2009)

It has been suggested that researchers select a research design, research strategy and research method(s) that are congruent with their philosophical worldview, which underpins the study

(Babchuk, 2019; Creswell, 2009; Gratton & Jones, 2004). Having these reference points in research methodology texts provided much insight into story boarding and scripting my project into one that is methodologically congruent and coherent – two requirements that are recommended (Holt & Tamminen, 2010). Some researchers are not always explicit in revealing their philosophical worldview. However, when contemplating one’s research topic and thinking through the research design, it is recommended that one recognise the underlying philosophy held (Creswell, 2009). Considering these building blocks in the research process, along with ‘signposts’ from methodology texts, I have endeavoured to make my research journey as explicit as possible – worldview to final product, i.e., theoretical explanation in the write up. In doing so, and by articulating my approach to knowledge and the research process, I was able to be transparent and accountable throughout my research journey – first to myself, my supervisory team (Promotor and Co-promotor), and the anticipated broader readership (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; 2018; Gratton & Jones, 2004; 2014).

Table 2.1 represents an example of four worldviews in contemporary research and the research designs aligned with them, as adapted from Creswell and colleagues (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; 2018).

Table 2.1. Four notable philosophical worldviews and their research designs (adapted from Creswell 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; 2018).

Philosophical worldview	Research design
Post positivist	More quantitative than qualitative
Constructivist	Qualitative
Advocacy / Participatory	Qualitative
Pragmatist	Suited for mixed methods

Reviewing pages of methodological texts along with attending several research methodology short courses (discussed in the next section) was time consuming. I certainly do not have all the answers, but one take away was the need for me to be systematic and rigorous as I moved through the phases of the research process. An analogy that comes to mind is one of a traveller, armed with map and compass, feet fitted with the appropriate walking shoes and headed into the unknown – a time before Google maps. My ‘walking shoes’ was in the form of years of tennis

playing experience, my map and compass, on the other hand, was in the form of practical guides, procedural checklists and exemplars (examples of other's work) presented in the texts and courses that I immersed myself in. For a review of this methodological literature (which I highly recommend), please see the work of Babchuk (2019), Creswell (2009), Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), Creswell and Guetterman (2019), as well as Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Figure 2.2 is an example of my interpretation of how methodological congruency and coherency was understood and applied in this Grounded Theory (GT) study. Other examples of how these checklists and practical guides have been applied in my own study will be presented throughout the various sections.

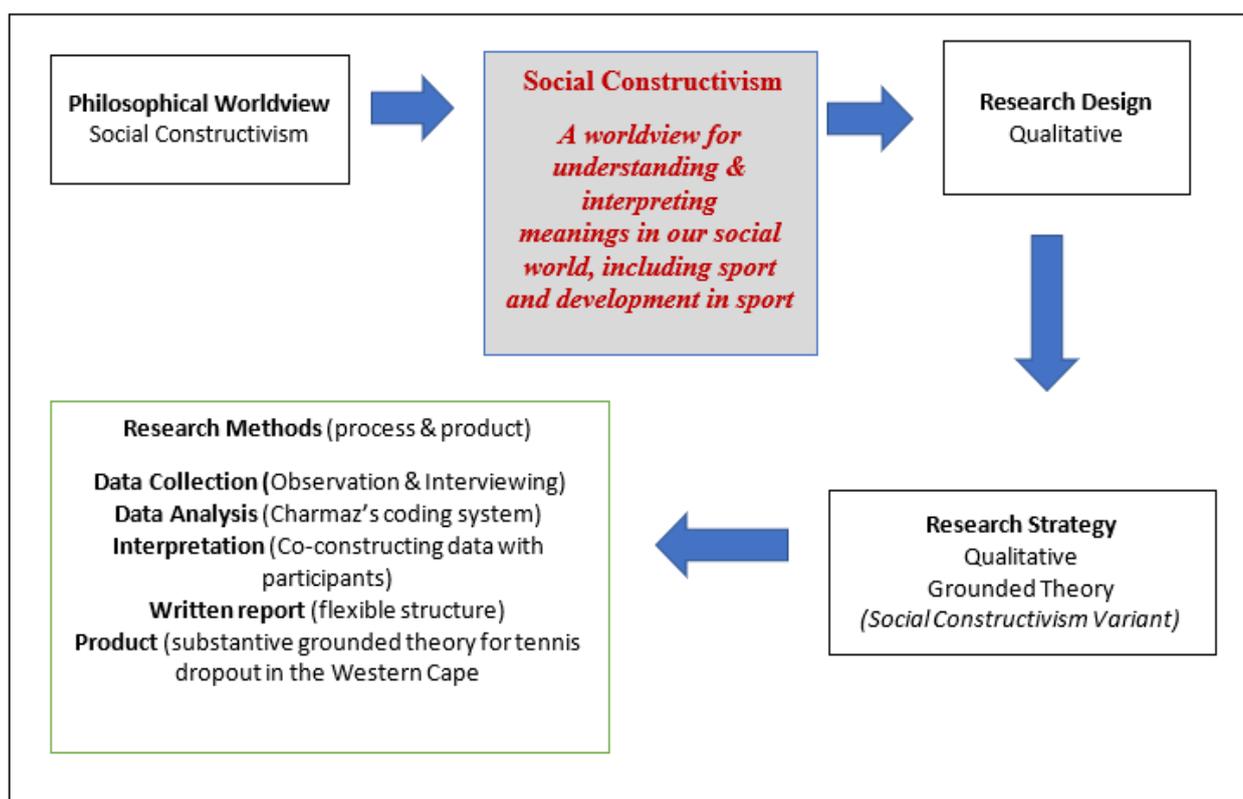


Figure 2.2. Steps in the research process for a Qualitative Constructivist Grounded Theory study: The process and product

2.2. Researcher positioning

2.2.1. The methodological maze

After reading the preceding section, you might be thinking, okay great, so what does this textbook like overview of the research process have to do with my particular study? Furthermore, why the

need for an overview on philosophy and the different research designs? Great questions. Similar thoughts plagued my mind in the beginning as well. In fact, at the beginning of my Ph.D. journey, my head was spinning with ideas on the topic of South African tennis players as well as designing an appropriate study to capture their developmental pathways – both contextually and methodologically. I felt confident on the contextual component of the tennis player pathway due to my lived experience of following a USA Collegiate tennis path. The tricky part for me, however, was the research methodology component and the subsequent design process. I lacked adequate training in research methodology, which led me to wander off the beaten path without really knowing that I had. Much of this meandering can be traced to my Master's degree in Behavioural Health Science (Marriage and Family Therapy) which included a minimal research project requirement. My training in research methodology, therefore, lacked the rigor and systematic requirements needed for a Doctoral degree.

During this pilgrimage of slight bewilderment in navigating the terrain of research methodology, I was introduced to a few methodology short courses from the beginning of 2018. I started with a mixed methods course that year and ended up doing a series of courses throughout my Ph.D. journey. The names of the courses and order in which they were completed are:

- 1) Mixed methods research design with Prof Timothy Guetterman (15-19 January, 2018);
- 2) Introduction to quantitative research design and methodology with Prof Timothy Guetterman (7-11 January, 2019);
- 3) Introduction to qualitative research design and methodology with Prof Wayne Babchuk (1-5 July, 2019);
- 4) Grounded theory: Methodology principles and practices with Prof Wayne Babchuk (11 January, 2020); and
- 5) Advanced qualitative research design and methodology with Prof Wayne Babchuk (13-17 January, 2020).

Most of these courses typically lasted five days, and later I became a facilitator in these courses, during which I learnt even more about the research process.

The more courses I took, the more I started to recognise and appreciate the systematic process of research and the logical steps one need to take in order to pursue methodological congruency and coherency in a study (Babchuk, 2019; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Holt & Tamminen, 2010).

I also realised that my broad area of interest, i.e., South African men's tennis players and their development process/pathways, could have been investigated/explored using a number of research designs and specific approaches (Creswell 2009; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). What I desperately needed, however, was to first grapple with my own research worldview and then, through this lens, figure out what (research) problem I was noticing in South African men's tennis – a research problem to be explored (Smith & Caddick, 2012). More importantly, could I articulate a research question from this vantage point and then choose a research design – a methodology and appropriate methods – to answer the research question(s) in a systematic and rigorous manner (Babchuk, 2019; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Fortunately, the answer was a resounding YES!

Before I continue, it is important to provide a sequence of events that spanned the course of my Ph.D. journey; starting with the submission of my first (approved) Ph.D. protocol to the undertaking of the short courses aforementioned. At this point, I need to connect the dots for you, as the reader, to demonstrate my vulnerability, credibility and trustworthiness as a Ph.D. student early on. These terms and others, as you will notice, will come up again and will be a common thread linking this project from beginning to end – including my own voice as the primary researcher. My need to provide a snapshot of the behind the scenes of my project is not novel, nor can I take the credit for it. These “confessional tales” – a candid disclosure of the research journey from the vantage point of the researcher – is a concept I learned from Sparkes and Smith (2014, p. 157). Sparkes and Smith (2014) eloquently describe the transparent position of the qualitative researcher; one that reveals their voice and their reflections throughout the research process. The following quote from their work captures the concept of confessional tales beautifully: “The ubiquitous disembodied voice of the realist tale is replaced by the personal voice of the author announcing their presence: ‘Here I am. This happened to me and this is how I felt, reacted and coped. Walk in my shoes for a while’” (p. 157).

Considering these confessional tales, let us take a stroll down memory lane to the time of the original proposal in 2016. My original proposal was approved by a Doctoral Oversight Committee and I received ethical approval in 2017 and an amendment in 2018 to include observational data collection. I originally planned a mixed methods study to understand tennis development pathways in South African tennis players, which would have focussed on dropout and investment

decisions. Mixed methods utilizes both quantitative data and qualitative data in a systematic manner to better understand and describe the central phenomenon and ultimately provide answers to the research question(s) in a holistic way (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). With my foundation in research methodology slightly firmer, I headed off into the realm of mixed methods research, actively pursuing this design with a pragmatic worldview as my research lens (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The following excerpt is a memo penned in November 2017. It reveals my thoughts and planning for the upcoming mixed methods workshop in January 2018:

Memo [November 28, 2017]: A) Context

1. Pilot studies

To date, a total of five pilot studies have been completed. This process was time consuming and spanned from May 16, 2017 – September 1, 2017.

During this time a number of Skype interviews were conducted with the experts in the field, namely: Dr Law (Quantitative interviewing with gymnasts), Dr Côté, Dr Fraser-Thomas (Quantitative interviews on dropout in youth sport), Dr Knight (Qualitative studies on tennis parents), Dr Holt (Positive Youth Development (PYD)), Dr Coutinho (Mixed methods in volleyball), and Dr Hvid Larsen (Successful athletic environments – qualitative case studies).

2. PhD notes and rationale for a mixed methods study

WHY Mixed methods?

1. Quantitative = interviews and data collection using charts

- *To understand the development of the athlete chronologically. The time spent in deliberate practice in tennis as well as the number of activities outside of tennis.*

2. Qualitative = semi-structured interviews

- *To understand the person and their development within their sport.*

I had some big ideas for my newfound mixed methods research design or so I thought! At the time, I mapped out and or envisioned combining quantitative elements of tennis player activities, such as deliberate practice and play activities (time spent in engagement) along with the qualitative elements of individual experiences of growing up on the junior tennis tour in South Africa. I set up online meetings and corresponded with some notable scholars in the youth sport

This instrument was a useful data collection tool, which I originally incorporated into my pilot interviews. Not only did I learn about the context of junior tennis development and the factors informing decisions to dropout or invest in the pathway, I also gained insight into the nuances of designing an ethically sound interview protocol. I remain grateful to the participants in the pilot study who assisted me in this endeavour.

Overall, 2018 was a pivotal year in helping to move the project and me forward. After completing the mixed methods course in January, I set out to gain a deeper understanding of competitive junior tennis and professional tennis environments, i.e., International Tennis Federation (ITF) tournaments. After receiving ethics approval for my amended protocol in 2018, I headed into the field to collect some observational data. This observational data formed part of my supplementary data set, collected at three consecutive International Tennis Federation (ITF) events (sites) hosted in South Africa in 2018. The specifics of data collection and analysis strategies will be discussed in later sections. For now, I will continue to connect the dots – presenting my confessional tales – from my experiences through memo's and observational excerpts from that period.

Entering the field as an observer – a tennis fan – armed with an observational protocol (see Appendix A), was an invaluable experience and helped provide rich context to the competitive world of a junior tennis player, in particular, a South African junior tennis player. Before entering the field as an observer, I must emphasize the importance of scripting one's observational plan, otherwise known as an observational protocol. Not only is it recommended by research methodology texts, it also provide guidance on how to be an intentional observer in the field. In other words, the how of observing as well as the process of capturing these observations in the form of field notes – written descriptions and reflections (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The following excerpts (December 2018) are field notes captured from my time in the field. These observations form part of my supplemental data, which augmented my primary data set (discussed in the methods section).

ITF Court side descriptions 2018

December 2018. Conditions are partly cloudy and overcast. Crowd conditions: Calm and quiet on and around court 1 and 2 (main matches are played here – they usually draw crowds). Rick and Steven (both pseudonyms) are playing singles. Rick appears calm, cool and collected. He is a little older than Steven. Business as usual for Rick. Steven, has quite a BIG support group seated court side. Family members sitting in front of me near the club house and academy (coaches and teammates) sitting court side. Interesting observations so far – family is a little vocal at times. Steven appears to have an interesting temperament and often questions calls and often looks to his support team. I have noticed frequent outbursts on court and arguments with chair umpires throughout the three weeks of these back-to-back tournaments. Two very different personalities on court! Steven loses his singles match to Rick.

The field notes above, i.e., ITF Court side descriptions 2018, present, at least for a keen courtside observer, the complexity of playing an individual sport like tennis, especially the singles format. Moreover, it provides a snap shot of the less glamorous side of the tour such as the bottom ring tournaments, i.e., the ITF Futures and Challenger events often played in obscure places and in tough conditions.

ITF Tournament reflections 2018

December 2018. “Interesting to note the other factors affecting the players – what has been noticeable is off court noise: Trucks, cranes, workers moving in and around the facility, but unrelated to the tennis events. There appears to be quite a bit of movement and work being done on the athletics stadium near the courts (alongside the tennis courts). Some of the players throughout the tournaments (three weeks) have been upset and distracted by this”.

The reflection above, i.e., ITF tournament reflections 2018, reveals some off court elements that played havoc with the player’s concentration and appeared to add to their frustrations during the three-week tournament period. This courtside experience of mine, helped fortify a deeper understanding and appreciation of what tennis players experience in the less glamorous competitive environment. Considering this rich courtside context, I became drawn to a research

design and approach that would highlight the holistic process of tennis development and the experiences of the players along the way – human and athletic.

After considerable thought and time – time consulting the literature, meeting with research methodologists and reflecting on the pilot interviews with the adapted (interview) instrument from Côté et al. (2005), I started having some doubts on using a mixed methods research design for my study. I kept coming back to my earlier thoughts and reflections on the person in the sporting (tennis) context. Figure 2.4 depicts some earlier memos and reflections (doodling) of mine – a tension of sorts – to try to place this developing tennis player in an appropriate context. Moreover, I grappled with the need to adequately explore their development and understand their tennis world through their eyes.

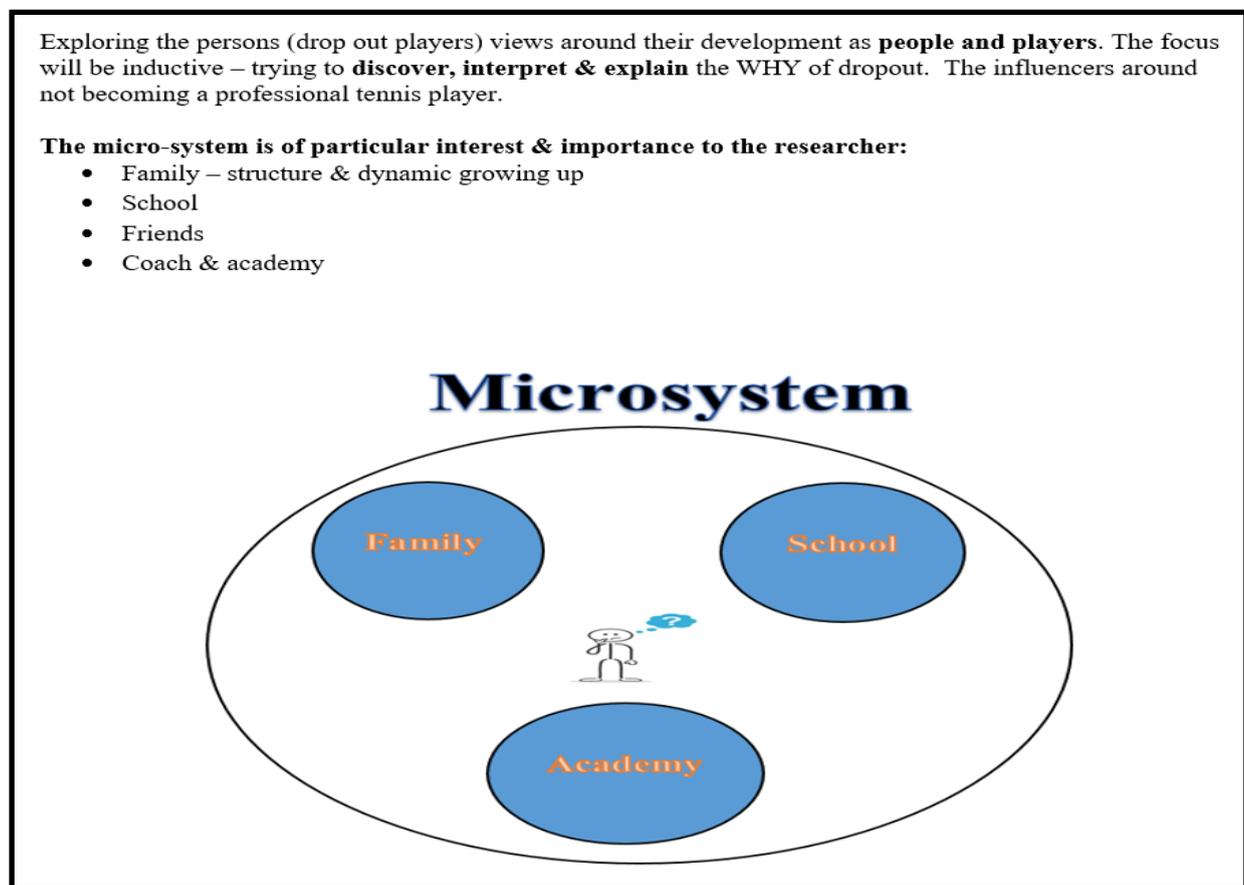


Figure 2.4. Memos and reflections (doodling) on the context of tennis development within South African men's tennis

Thinking through these ideas, I could not help but notice the specificity of the data collection tool – which is good if you are truly interested in specific metrics on development in sport over time. I, however, was after the subtlety of the tennis development process from the players themselves – their voices on living the experience. The focus of the study in the early stages was on dropout and investment decisions of South African tennis players, so it made sense to have a research design like mixed methods to explore and understand the complexity of tennis development from a holistic perspective. On paper, this made sense, especially considering the inclusive language of holistic. However, the word holistic can be misleading in this context.

Holistic, for my study, did not need to be confined to two data sets (one quantitative and one qualitative), merged together in true mixed methods style to capture the complexity of development over time. No, on the contrary, the holistic element that I was truly after was the human experience of the developing tennis player within their world – both as an individual and collective voice. This world, shared in their words, would tell the story of their development and transition process within and out of the professional player pathway. Holistic cannot be confined to space and time (or even be captured on this page), but rather denotes the emergent nature of development and subsequent transitions – the raw, nuanced and subjective version. Reading between the lines here, a keen observer would notice the shift toward a pure qualitative research design to capture and represent these subtleties and nuances. As it turns out in retrospect, I may have been interested in this aspect all along, but could not quite articulate it at the time of the original research proposal phase – possibly, traced in part, to my shaky foundation in research philosophy and methodology at the start. This shift toward a pure qualitative study will be elaborated on in more detail along with the specific approach employed in later sections.

As I continued consulting research methodology literature, I started to recognise and appreciate certain prerequisites for conducting a mixed methods study. These include extensive time, resources, and skill in both quantitative and qualitative designs. It is also recommended that researchers consider conducting mixed methods studies in teams (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In sum and after considering the prerequisites and recommendations from experts, I concluded that my ideas for a mixed methods study could be shelved for another time, post Ph.D.

During the process of reimagining my research design and approach, I spent time in reflection (memo writing) and further reading specifically in qualitative research methodology (Babchuk, 2019; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell 2009; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Moreover, I was encouraged, as I read, to be more intentional about logging my thoughts and keeping a methodological journal (Charmaz, 2014). It must be stated that since the beginning of my Ph.D., I have penned my thoughts, reflections and ideas. Journaling has always been part of my life so it felt quite natural to continue this activity/ habit during my Ph.D. as well. It was encouraging, nonetheless, to read some of the qualitative scholars suggesting this in their writings as well (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Journaling and memo writing throughout the research process was useful and assisted me in sorting through different leads and ideas. Furthermore, these written reflections moved the study forward to find the eventual best fit.

The following memo entry (August 3, 2018) is an example of the tension within me as I wrestled with finding the best fit (research design) for my study. Moreover, it reveals my quest, early on, to understand and capture some aspect of the human experience in sport, i.e., South African children growing up in the competitive tennis environment.

Memo [August 3, 2018]

“I specifically want to understand [the behind the scenes of] children in the developing sport context and reasons for some to drop out or engage in sport. The American College of Sport Medicine recognises children as a special populations group and, therefore, the broader implications of this should influence the context of children in sport. Sadly, however, the race for medals, college scholarships and the pressures to perform and excel (from parents and coaches) has resulted in many promising young athletes quitting the elite sporting pathway and either dropping out of sport in general or dropping out of their main sport. From what I am reading and interpreting from the literature in youth sport studies, children's childhoods are, in many instances, being hijacked. I would further suggest that their identities have not properly differentiated resulting in a somewhat stunted emotional state”.

2.2.2. Walking in my tennis shoes: Another layer to my researcher positioning

After reading the section on researcher positioning, you may be wondering why an additional section on the researcher? The best way to respond is simply to say that this section is a layer deeper than merely my academic pursuit. This section – my auto-ethnography – is an important part of my life; arguably a lifetime invested in tennis, pre-Ph.D.! However, I must emphasize that this account is not a standalone biographical story of my life, but rather an account embedded in the research topic. Therefore, and unlike some of the other approaches to qualitative research, such as some forms of phenomenology that requires the researcher to bracket their biases and views, not so with my choice and utilization of GT. I have fully embraced a GT approach to qualitative research and its sub-approach of constructivism. Therefore, I deem this story an important one to share. Not only does it fortify the thread of my study by emphasizing the connectedness of self, researcher and researched, it adds to the credibility throughout – process to product, i.e., a total methodology. So, indulge me for a moment as we take a few steps back in time – imagining a girl, a tennis racquet and a dream. *This is my tennis story...*

I grew up on 3 Eden Road, Uvongo. Uvungu – in the Zulu language – is a little coastal town on the South Eastern seaboard of South Africa, in the Province of Kwazulu Natal. Locating this little town on a world map may be challenging, so let us zoom in on Durban, the capital city of the Province. Got it? Ok, now Uvongo is an hour and a half's drive South of Durban. This was my home for the better part of my childhood – a stomping ground, both in reality and in my imagination, where my world and the world of tennis seemed to be within reach.

A significant part of my childhood was spent playing sport. I was an all-rounder, a multi-sport athlete – a term from youth sport literature that I would later come to be very familiar with. Having the great outdoors at my disposal, including tennis courts down the road, my imagination would run wild and fill my playtime with different adventures and games. I have one sibling, a younger brother, who would accompany me on many of these outdoor adventures. I cannot remember if he was my sidekick, or if I was his, either way there was never a dull moment as we played and roamed free for countless hours in our backyard (garden).

Our backyard games entailed anything and everything from fort building, tree climbing, galloping across the lawn on our broomstick horses – adorned with some sort of western attire. Some of my

favourite games, however, were the sporting ones. Usually on a weekend, our family would gather around the television – I am an 80’s kid, so there were no separate streaming devices or a Netflix option. We would all be invested in a live broadcast of some sporting event. This then would set the scene for the rest of the afternoon’s outdoor playtime. For example, if the Comrades Marathon was on, my brother and I would somehow try to re-enact the final leg of the race – for us a few laps around our garden would suffice. Another sporting re-enactment would come in the form of racquets and ball when the Grand Slam tennis championships were broadcast. Our garden would magically turn into a stadium court hosting my brother and me as Grand Slam finalists battling it out for trophy and title in our Wimbledon whites. We played to a full stadium of course, as large as our imaginations would allow. Sometimes these matches and backyard games were a little rushed in order to heed the motherly call of ‘hurry up’ as our bath times quickly approached.

As I grew, interestingly enough, so too did my childhood dream of playing tennis. The older I became, the more intense the dream was. One would think the opposite would be true, that as I grew I would outgrow this childhood ‘pipe’ dream – a term some dissenting voices from my hometown would use to dissuade me. I was told it would never happen. Some declaring that I had peaked and reached my tennis prime as a mid to late teen. These sentiments, though hard and heavy for a teenager to hear, carried no weight in deterring me from my relentless pursuit of playing tennis overseas – USA Collegiate tennis in particular.

In fact, if anything, these sentiments seemed to fuel me in my single-mindedness, resilience and determination to make it happen! I guess, at the heart of it, I have always been drawn to the underdog narrative – always rooting for that one kid that everyone seemed to overlook, deselect or pick on. Ironically, I was not the underdog in my school days. I always seemed to thrive in the classroom and on the sports field. I guess the sensitivity toward the underdog narrative can be traced to hearing stories throughout my childhood of how my Dad was bullied and ridiculed as a little boy at school by both teachers and peers. I learned that as a child, my Father, struggled with a learning disability at school – dyslexia. Thankfully, he overcame this and in time would be the pioneering voice, challenging and encouraging me to dream BIG!

With time, I could relate to being somewhat of an underdog as I awkwardly transitioned into adulthood. Why awkward? Well, it felt awkward (at times), carrying a childhood tennis dream

into new, uncharted terrain of adulthood. Nevertheless, I kept my tennis shoes on and kept walking...

As I pen this, I get a little sentimental and almost protective thinking of other kids walking in similar shoes – to those who still have BIG dreams and not really knowing the why's and how's. Some being told, by the adults in their lives (teachers, coaches, parents), “It's impossible. You are not good enough. You will never make it. You don't have the finances”. I wonder how many adults rue the day or have regrets for not, at least, being mindful of the words they utter to an audience of young, vulnerable minds and identities – words that are cutting, invasive, and received (many times) as an absolute. Consequently, I wonder how many of these kids throw in the towel, or worse, hang up their tennis shoes and leave their tennis playing days behind? I recognise and appreciate that I do not have predictive power to project futuristic events, nor do I wish to, however, it does beg the million dollar ‘what if’ question. What if the ‘ingredients’ of nurture, rather than nature, had been different in these hypothetical kids’ lives? I am almost convinced that these proverbial what if question(s) transcend sport and tennis. Regardless of context, these are questions that should move one to careful introspection and reflection when working in the people business, especially when working with children!

In my story, which I can confidently share in hindsight, it was a case of nurture – or at least my interpretation would suggest this. Sure, I was the multi-sport athlete with a good physical literacy foundation acquired possibly in my backyard free play and / or in primary school guided play. All of which formed part of the (tangible) ingredients of growing up and being afforded opportunities and access to develop skill acquisition transferable to my main sport (tennis) which I only specialized in, in my late teens. However, the nurture ingredients (intangible) – love, affirmation, positive reinforcement, mentorship, parental guidance, etc. – within my nuclear family, may have been the ones that tipped the scales in my favour, along with a bit of ‘luck’ – whatever definition you assign to this term of metaphysical unknowable's – either way, I grew, continued to dream and strategically followed the dream all the way to the USA.

It was the spring tennis season (January 2004) when I landed in Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA. Ironically, it did not look or feel anything like the springs I had grown up with in coastal South Africa. No, this was landlocked Oklahoma that looked like a winter wonderland out of a movie

scene – snow covered lawn, rooftops and trees. My Dad accompanied me to Tulsa that year. It was my Dad's second time in the USA and my first. It almost felt like this trip was the culmination of years of Father-daughter traditions of first day school drop offs. My Dad had taken on the role of doing first day school drop offs all the way back to the first day of primary school, high school and now first day of University. This time, the school drop off was thousands of miles away at Oral Roberts University (ORU) in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I was dropped off, or as my Dad said, “gently put down” and moved into Susie 3, affectionately known as Unity – the tennis floor of a women's dormitory at ORU. My entry ticket was a full ride – a full, four-year athletic (tennis) scholarship worth tens of thousands of US dollars. This meant that I would graduate with a fully paid for Undergraduate degree in Health and Exercise Science (Cum Laude), debt free. If that was not enough, to add to the gravitas of this gift that had been awarded me, the ORU athletic department invested in my Master's degree as well. Nevertheless, that is a story for another day.

Susie 3, would become my new home for the next four years of my undergraduate life. My floor mates were my tennis teammates and, what we called, ‘regular’ students, many of whom were night owls and late risers. Not so with my teammates and I. We followed strict schedules that we had to adhere to in order to manage both semi-professional tennis along with a four-year degree. Burning the candle at the both ends, I am afraid, would not cut it. Well, I guess one could have tried, but then you would risk being cut from the team or risk being deported if you lost your scholarship – a fearful reality check for my international teammates and I. All athletes, regardless of sport and nationality, had to maintain a certain Grade Point Average (GPA) in order to remain eligible to compete as per NCAA regulations. Our constant reminder was that ORU was a Division I NCAA school, so no “goofing off”, as our Coach would have said!

This mix of athletes and regular students seemed to work well for my teammates and I. This element seemed to provide a sense of normalcy to the sometimes overwhelming juggle of heavy workload of tennis, training, travel and school. It was always heart-warming to return to campus after a long tennis trip, to Vegas, etc. to a group of dorm mates – friends – who would high five us or invite us over for a movie night regardless of the tournament outcome. Win or lose, the girls of Susie 3 had our backs. They were our constant. They were always there.

The college tennis environment, I quickly learned, is not for the faint at heart. A lot of my growing up – growing into my tennis shoes and adult shoes – happened in those four years at ORU. Tennis is an individual sport, but college tennis is a team sport. The doubles point is a BIG deal and sets the stage for the singles matches that proceed it. Usually, there are three doubles teams. In our team of six players (some years seven with walk-on's), this meant that the whole team needed to compete and bring their A-game to every tournament. A team would win the doubles point if two of the teams won their doubles matches – the best of three matches. A super tiebreak was generally played in the doubles format. To win the doubles point in college tennis is a triumph all on its own. There is a sense of confidence that is forged in these wins. A surreal confidence that is needed when heading onto the singles court to face your opponent on your own.

On-court coaching is allowed in college tennis and certainly adds another layer to an already charged and pressurized competitive environment. On-court coaching was generally done during the changeovers between odd games. Those courtside coaching moments (I remember well), could sway a player and throw a match – depending on how those interactions were received by the player. There were times when my first college coach would play a sort of bad cop, good cop role. When in the bad cop role, the topic of scholarship retention would be raised. To any player this topic is a sensitive one, to an international player, this is your whole world. The stakes are high for international players, not only are you playing for your tennis team, but your family, your country and a chance at a better life. To have one's scholarship threatened when you are down in a tight match, weighs heavily on your emotions and affects your playing style. Playing tight and / or reverting to a defensive style to prevent losing is a horrible experience.

The reality check for me in USA collegiate sport is that you are an athlete first and student second. No one could really prepare you for this environment and / or new identity, i.e., student-athlete. Ironically, the student-athlete term does not quite capture the lived experience of juggling dual identity roles. Your worth and position on the team is often perceived as being tied to performing well for the team – it is all about the team and the reputation of the school. Tennis, as a college sport, is a minor sport compared to the team sports such as American Football, Basketball and Baseball. At ORU, doing well in tennis would draw attention from other sports along with recognition from the University president, faculty and student body.

Reflecting on my own journey as a competitive tennis player who transitioned into semi-professional tennis and later used this collegiate platform, as a stepping-stone into life, was influential in setting the scene and undergirding the research topic in this dissertation. Auto-ethnographies, unlike biographical accounts, are related to the researcher's area of interest – a snap shot of relatability with the topic itself (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By undergoing this additional step of reflecting and presenting my own journey as a South African tennis player provided rich context and credibility to the study. Moreover, these experiences formed part of the bridge, or in, with the tennis participants as they saw me as someone to be trusted with their own tennis stories.

2.2.3. Qualitative research: The exploration and best fit

The research problem and research question helps drive the research design process (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In other words, one needs to ask, what is the best way to answer the research question? Also, what methodology and methods (tools) will accomplish this? Essentially, what is the best fit for the project? Finding the best fit for my research study was my next BIG undertaking. The concept of best fit suggests that an appropriate research design (plan) is selected and then followed (congruently and coherently) throughout the research process – a total methodology from start to finish (Babchuk, 2019; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Holt & Tamminen, 2010; Smith & Caddick, 2012). Babchuk (2019) suggested that the research design which is “the overall plan of the research study, should be analytically congruent with all pieces fitting neatly together throughout design, implementation and analysis phases” (p. 2). The overall plan is inclusive of the researcher's philosophical stance, in other words, how the world is seen through their eyes. Smith and Caddick (2012) asserted that a researcher's worldview and / or beliefs cannot be compartmentalized when conducting research. Regardless if one's views on epistemology and ontology are explicit or not, it is important to note that, these views underpin and shape the entire research process (Creswell, 2009; Smith & Caddick, 2012).

With this newfound awareness of worldviews and the links to research design, I became curious how this could be applied to exploring the experiences of South African men's tennis players, both on and off the tennis court. More importantly, I wondered how I could comprehensively understand and bring attention to the person in the sport of tennis, particularly in a South African

context – a coming of age story of sorts depicting South African boys becoming men while walking out their tennis journey. Considering this, I continued to read literature in performance sport and sport psychology and then reflected on the observational data I collected.

Sport related studies, oriented in a positivist worldview, are generally deductive in nature and lean toward an objective view of reality (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Natural science, with an emphasis on measurements in controlled research environments, are associated with such a worldview. The position of the researcher – an objective investigator – can appear almost detached and or give the impression of “disinterested scientist” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 10). Quantitative research designs employed by the sport scientist – within an objectivist orientation – focus on predicting, measuring and exerting control of the phenomena under investigation (Gratton & Jones, 2004; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Gratton and Jones (2004) asserted that for the positivist interested in research across sporting environments, the objective view believes that these environments are “relatively stable across different times and settings” (p. 16). Employing the scientific method for theory development, observation and prediction of human behaviour within a controlled environment over time is viewed by the objective sport scientist as a reliable approach to research. Moreover, to insert feelings and grapple with researcher positioning and interpretation within this context has no place in quantitative designs (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

Within the competitive and elite sport environment, there is an interest in observing, measuring and monitoring performance outcomes for development and performance analysis purposes (Miller, 2012; Rongen et al., 2015). In sum, athletic profiles are generated from data using various standardized fitness tests and anthropometric measurements. The quantitative data collected on each athlete is compared to normative data and used to assess and monitor performances (current and future) over time. Time-tested data of this nature, undoubtedly, has its place. Specific metrics and descriptive data on athletes within their sport is valuable and the information can be used in various ways, i.e., designing periodized training programmes, monitoring the athletes’ progress or performance, and assisting with goal setting (Miller, 2012). Moreover, these metrics can be utilized as selection criteria in youth sport programmes where promising athletes are selected from the “broader participating population” into specialised programmes or academies (Rongen et al., 2015, p. 34). I understand that one could become quite dogmatic when assigning meaning to these performance profiles, i.e., assigning equal value to performance and person. In other words,

viewing the person (athlete) and their performance as synonymous – one and the same. I grappled with these existential reflections on athlete identity and their performance outcomes right from the beginning of my project. Especially, when I imagined the developing athlete, i.e., the growing child and or adolescent. It begs the question, who is the athlete without their performance? In tennis, this question could be reframed as, who is the tennis player without an ITF and or ATP ranking milestone? As I pen this, I am reminded of a recent Netflix trailer for Naomi Osaka's documentary, titled: Naomi Osaka. One of Naomi's direct quotes in the trailer states:

“For so long I tied winning to my worth as a person. To anyone that would know me they know me for being a tennis player. So like, what am I if I'm not a good tennis player?”

How poignant and timely for sport and society at large to be discussing topics of person and performance in 2021, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, such discussions should encourage sport science researchers to consider adopting philosophies outside of positivist/objectivist when viewing research problems and topics within sport.

The complexity of the person within the sport environment is multifaceted and cannot be ignored. Moreover, the subjective characteristics of the person inhabiting and making meaning of their sporting world(s) is poised to be explored and understood through qualitative research designs (Gratton & Jones, 2004; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Not surprisingly, a growing interest to explore, understand and describe the subjective meanings of people in sport has led to the use of qualitative research methods within sport and exercise psychology (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The dominance of quantitative designs is evident in this discipline and is still recognised as most popular – the positivist and post-positivist worldview still leading the way (Hagger & Smith, 2018).

However, and in the wake of a paradigm shift for many scholars interested in the athlete voice and their lived experiences along with reflecting on their own biases/positions in society, there is a shift to qualitative research methods (Hagger & Smith, 2018; McGannon et al., 2021; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In a recent review on qualitative research in six notable sport and exercise psychology journals, McGannon et al. (2021) asserted that although a post-positivism paradigm is still present in published work, qualitative scholars have been encouraged to explore and orient themselves within other paradigms. This recommendation and awareness is encouraging. Also,

the use of and appreciation for qualitative designs as a rigorous and systematic approach to research within the discipline is promising (McGannon et al., 2021).

So, how did this methodological discussion regarding best fit influence my decision making for my tennis project? Firstly, reflecting on my time in the field – courtside – solidified the parts of the project that I was seeing in my mind’s eye, but could not quite articulate. These parts, I would later learn, are distinct characteristics of qualitative research. The qualitative researcher is concerned with process and context, meaning making, subjective experiences of the participants, and rich descriptions in the natural setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The experience of witnessing raw emotion and vulnerability in the wins and losses showed me something of the regularity of being a person (tennis player) and growing up in the competitive tennis environment. In other words, and from my observation, there appeared to be no immunity to the devastation of loss, for example, and the expression of it – though presented differently for each person.

As I reflected on these field experiences, I noticed other attractive characteristics of qualitative research and strategies in the literature that spurred me on in my pursuit of best fit. Babchuk (2019) highlighted the following attributes of qualitative research that distinguishes the design and approach from quantitative research. “Qualitative researchers aspire to shift the mantle of authority from the investigator to the participants, the latter viewed and purposefully selected as the expert on the central phenomenon of study and therefore assuming more status and a greater role in the research than historically accorded by more paternalistic forms of quantitative enquiry” (p. 2).

Considering this characteristic, i.e., the researcher as the instrument for data collection, there is a unique opportunity afforded to the researcher whereby close contact with participants allows for immersion and learning to occur in the natural setting – the world of the participants being fully embraced (Babchuk, 2019). Quantitative researchers are not so inclined. Other notable attributes of qualitative research that helped inform my decision to pursue this form of inquiry include non-random purposeful sampling methods, interpretative, subjective and reflexive focus, iterative and flexible designs, and the combination of multiple forms of data collection strategies to provide depth of understanding (Babchuk, 2019; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Moreover, when considering the question of ontology and the researcher's position, it is helpful to distinguish (from the beginning) between the quantitative stance and qualitative stance. The qualitative researcher, unlike her quantitative counterpart, is recognised as active in the research process (Babchuk, 2019). In other words, the qualitative researcher and their participants are in a dynamic relationship where each is influencing the other throughout the process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

In general, qualitative research can be difficult to describe as it has different definitions and carries different meaning to different groups dependent upon the qualitative tradition held (Smith & Caddick, 2012; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Considering my own study and the shift to focus on the developing person (tennis player) and their development and transition processes, it became evident that a qualitative research design was the best fit. I was encouraged to learn that qualitative research designs are valuable for sport scientists whose lens for studying the sporting world is orientated within social science (Smith & Caddick, 2012). Furthermore, qualitative research methodologies caught my attention, as previously mentioned, as I noted innovative approaches employed to better understand, explore, interpret and describe people and their experiences in the research setting, i.e., South African men's tennis players. Moreover, I found it encouraging to learn that qualitative research approaches are being widely adopted and applied in a variety of academic disciplines (Babchuk, 2019). This is evident in sport related studies when qualitative designs are used to better understand the athlete (their voice) and their experiences within these sport environment(s) (Gratton & Jones, 2004; Henriksen, 2010; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Understanding the broad nature and philosophical orientation of qualitative research made sense for my project, however, the challenge came when confronted with the specificity of selecting an appropriate approach and sub-approach (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guetterman et al., (In Preparation)). Fortunately, the training I received through the research methodology short courses had me revisit some of the major approaches presented in the literature. Creswell (2009) synthesized the various approaches to qualitative research and presented five main approaches that are deemed widely used, namely: ethnography, narrative, phenomenology, case study and grounded theory. Each of these approaches claim a philosophical underpinning and may have varied sub-approaches. Action research and discourse analysis are also noted in the literature as popular approaches to qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Creswell

& Guetterman, 2019; Guetterman et al., (In Preparation)). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) include basic qualitative research to the list of qualitative approaches. Due to my training in ‘Creswellian’ qualitative research methods, it is important to note that I have referenced the approaches I was trained in. Considering this training, I came to value the set of systematic and rigorous procedures (step-by-step guides) on how to conduct research using the specific approach chosen (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Table 2.2 is an example of some considerations presented in the literature that guided my selection of approach and sub-approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Understanding the origin, definition and overall purpose of each approach helped inform my decision of finding the best fit for answering the research question. After careful consideration, I selected grounded theory using the sub-approach of constructivism (Charmaz, 2014).

Table 2.2. Five major approaches to qualitative research: Considerations for best fit (adapted from Creswell & Poth, 2018).

	Ethnography	Narrative	Case Study	Phenomenology	Grounded Theory
Origin	Anthropology and Sociology	History, Literature, Anthropology, Sociology	Social science	Social and Health Science	Sociology and Health Sciences
Definition	Focused on shared behaviours/ beliefs/views of culture sharing group	Focused on individual(s) (1-2) experiences by chronologically re-telling/re-storing these experiences	Methodology and approach to explore a specific bounded system (case)	Philosophy and approach focused on detailed description of individuals lived experience - all individuals share in (phenomenon) the lived experience	Moving beyond interpretation and description to theory generation from data
Purpose	Describe and interpret = Producing a product ethnography of rich and detailed descriptions of culture sharing group	Retell/ re-story experiential narrative in a structured (written) framework	To gain insight into complexity of bounded system through detailed descriptions on key focus areas	Detailed description of the what and the how of individuals lived experiences	To generate theory (product) or theoretical framework of process experienced by individuals

Data Collection Tools	Extended time in the field using multiple tools (emphasis on observational field work)	Multiple tools (interviews, observations, focus groups)	Multiple tools (interviews, observational focus groups, document analysis)	Interviews as main data collection tool	Interviews (primary) and observational (supplemental)
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2.3. Grounded Theory: Overview of approach

Grounded theory (GT) is a qualitative research approach that originated in the social and health sciences and can be traced back to the 1960's (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Guetterman et al., (In Preparation); Holt, 2016). In a time when quantitative designs saturated research across a number of disciplines with theory and hypothesis testing and using a predominantly, positivist and post-positivist approach to seeing, knowing and understanding the world, a group of researchers sought to generate theories of their own around the concept of death and dying in a hospital setting (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2009; Holt, 2016).

Two social scientists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, trained in quantitative research methodology of the day, observed the process of dying in a number of hospitals, specifically noting “how and when professionals and their terminally ill patients knew they were dying and how they handled the news” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 5). Glaser and Strauss’s ground-breaking research was published in three major volumes beginning with *Awareness of Dying* (1965), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), and *Time for Dying* (1968). Bryant (2017) refers to these three works as the “dying trilogy”: *Awareness, Discovery and Time*” (p. ix). Glaser and Strauss’s seminal work on methods published in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) presented rigorous, innovative and systematic alternative strategies for conducting qualitative research at a time when the prevailing methods were embedded in quantitative designs (Charmaz, 2014).

The dominant philosophical approach to research during the mid-1960's stemmed from natural science, which holds positivism (and post-positivism) as the lens through which one can understand and quantify their world (Charmaz, 2006; 2014; Creswell, 2009). Charmaz (2014) remarks on the context of the 1960's in the United States where it was observed that “hospital staff seldom talked about or even acknowledged dying and death with seriously ill patients” (p.

5). This pioneering research, arguably ahead of its time, set the stage for future generations of qualitative scholars and the application of contemporary grounded theory work seen today (Babchuk, 2019; Charmaz, 2014; Guetterman et al. (In Preparation); Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Glaser and Strauss, the founders of GT, are credited for their contribution to abstract theory generation using qualitative analysis to understand and explain a social process (Babchuk, 2019; Charmaz, 2014). Guetterman et al. (In Preparation) asserts that GT is a process and a product and has various applications or sub-approaches. These sub-approaches differ in their philosophical underpinnings as well as their application (methodology) (Bryant, 2017). Bryant (2017) notes three sub-approaches to GT, while Guetterman et al. (2017) note four sub-approaches. The four major sub-approaches include classic grounded theory by Glaser, systematic grounded theory by Strauss and Corbin, constructivist grounded theory by Charmaz, and situational analysis by Clarke (Guetterman et al., 2017). Table 2.3 presents the four major sub-approaches to GT along with their philosophical underpinnings.

Table 2.3. Four sub-approaches to Grounded Theory (adapted from Guetterman et al., 2017)

	Barney Glaser	Anselm Strauss & Juliet Corbin	Kathy Charmaz	Adele Clarke
Philosophy	Positivist	Post positivist	Constructivist	Post modern
Approaches	Classic Grounded Theory	Systematic Grounded Theory	Constructivist Grounded Theory	Situational Analysis

GT, as a qualitative research approach, shares many of the characteristics associated with the aforementioned qualitative research designs, however, one of its unique characteristics that distinguishes it from other approaches is its ability to generate theory from data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Guetterman et al., 2017; Walsh, 2015). Some of the other major components of GT include, a concern for a social process occurring over time, memoing as a way to aid theory development, data collection and analysis is iterative and occurs simultaneously, the inductive nature involves various forms of coding and categorical development (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guetterman et al., 2017).

Recognising and understanding the differences between the sub-approaches, both philosophically and in application, is the first step in making an informed decision on what sub-approach to choose (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Moreover, to recognise and appreciate (from the beginning) one's goal for selecting GT and the sub-approach is paramount in continuing with the chosen qualitative approach (Belgrave & Seide, 2019). Belgrave and Seide (2019) suggest that not all users of GT have the goal to generate theory, as some view the approach as a set of useful analytic tools rather than a complete methodology. For my study, I have chosen to view GT and the sub-approach of constructivism as a total methodology – a process and a product (Holt, 2016). My end goal being the generation of a theoretical model to understand and explain South African tennis player's development and transition processes in the men's game.

GT situated within the constructivist paradigm (worldview), is suited to co-construct rich meaning from the participants' view of the data (Lincoln et al., 2011). Unlike classic GT, where discovery, meaning and eventual theory are discovered in data, the constructivist variant acknowledges the dynamic, iterative interplay between researcher and participants – co-construction is a product of this relationship (Charmaz, 2014). In applying the constructivist variant as a total methodology for my study, my own position as researcher and co-participant in meaning making, interpretation, and co-construction of theory is acknowledged (Charmaz, 2014).

2.3.1. Rationale for the constructivist approach: *If the shoe fits, wear it*

Considering sport studies and the shift from positivist/post-positivist paradigms toward interpretivism and constructivism, the discipline of sport sociology comes to mind (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Sport sociology, a key topic area of sociology, is interested in people's interactions and behaviours in their sporting context. Sport when viewed through a sport sociology lens, however, acknowledges the interplay between sport and society – the sport context is not seen as detached from society, but inclusive of it (Gratton & Jones, 2004; Jarvie, 2006; Mennell, 2006). When I consider sport as a social phenomenon, it makes sense to employ a GT approach for my study, as I am essentially interested in a social process or phenomenon within the South African men's tennis context (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Gratton & Jones, 2004; Guetterman et al., 2017; Jarvie, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Other contemporary discussions and studies within sport, under the umbrella of sport psychology, have shown interest in the person (performer), their health and the interplay of the environment on performance (Carlson, 2011; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2015; Henriksen, 2010). Developmental psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner's pioneering work in human behaviour and human interaction(s) known as the Ecological Systems Theory has influenced this field (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2015). The position of the person (performer) in the performance sport context are highlighted and recognised as pivotal within this framework. Sport sociology and sport psychology literature helped provide perspective and fortified my rationale for a qualitative design oriented within constructivism (Charmaz, 2014; Gratton & Jones, 2004; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

As the primary researcher, I lean toward an altruistic view when it comes to research endeavours. In other words, I am convinced (albeit naively) that research, if conducted ethically and transparently, can be used to enhance the discipline it is associated with and, most importantly, can be translated into practice. In my own project, I chose not to employ some of the contemporary, transformative approaches such as action research to understand the topic of development and transitions processes in South African men's tennis. However, I believe that my selection of GT as best fit and the study as a whole – the process and product (theoretical explanation) – made a valuable contribution both in theory and potential application. How so? Well, let us consider the two major categories of research, i.e., basic and applied (Gratton & Jones, 2004; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Regarding basic research, I would suggest that I have added value to the discussion within the broader youth sport development area, in particular, to the concept of the developing person in sport. Additionally, the South African tennis landscape within the Western Cape, added another unique contribution to the ongoing discussion on long-term development and the transition processes of athletes. Lastly, my researcher positioning, as a former competitive tennis player, undergirds the study and adds depth of understanding to the South African men's tennis landscape – something that makes me very proud.

Regarding applied research, when I reflect on my participant's tennis journey and experiences in the competitive tennis environment, I consider this undertaking worth it, for their sake. The potential application and future reach of the project (product) was made clear throughout the interview process and even more so in the follow-up member checking procedures – returning to the participants with findings for feedback and confirmation. During this process, it was noted

that the player's collective voice saw value in presenting the study and its findings to the appropriate South African sporting bodies for further discussion and reflection. The incentive being on what the players deem appropriate for discussion and action – their voices being heard/understood in unison on a number of key areas within South African men's tennis (please see Chapter 3 for the findings).

In sum, there is already a body of work done in sport science employing quantitative research designs and strategies to answer the research question and ultimately generalize the results, and for good reason (Gratton & Jones, 2004; Hagger & Smith, 2018). In my study, I saw value in embracing a philosophy and methodology that would put the person within sport at the forefront. Considering this perspective, I selected GT, using constructivism as the sub-approach as the best fit to answer the research question (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Finally, positioning myself in the youth sport dialogue as a qualitative researcher can be summed in the following memo, which I penned on 1 August 2019:

Memo: 1 August 2019

*As I pen this, I am aware that my work is a coalescence from generations of pioneers gone before me in the field of behavioural health sciences. One such giant and pioneer of the ecological model / framework for understanding human development is Professor Urie Bronfenbrenner. Considering his work, I echo his sentiments in his quote from his book entitled: *The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design*. This quote beautifully and succinctly articulates the intended vision of my research in youth sports – long-term human development in the sport context:*

“Public policy has the power to affect the well-being and development of human beings by determining the conditions of their lives. This realization led to my heavy involvement during the-past fifteen years in efforts to change, develop, and implement policies in my own country that could influence the lives of children and families” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979. p. xiii)

2.4. Methods

The methods (tools) employed in qualitative research designs are dependent upon the specific qualitative approach and sub-approach chosen (Guetterman et al., 2017). In this study, I selected a GT approach using the sub-approach of constructivism. Considering this, the methods package employed (sampling strategies, data collection, data analysis and theory generation) required alignment with the specific sub-approach selected (Charmaz, 2014; Guetterman et al., 2017).

Figure 2.5 is a memo mapping out the methods employed in the study and is based on the work of Charmaz (2014).

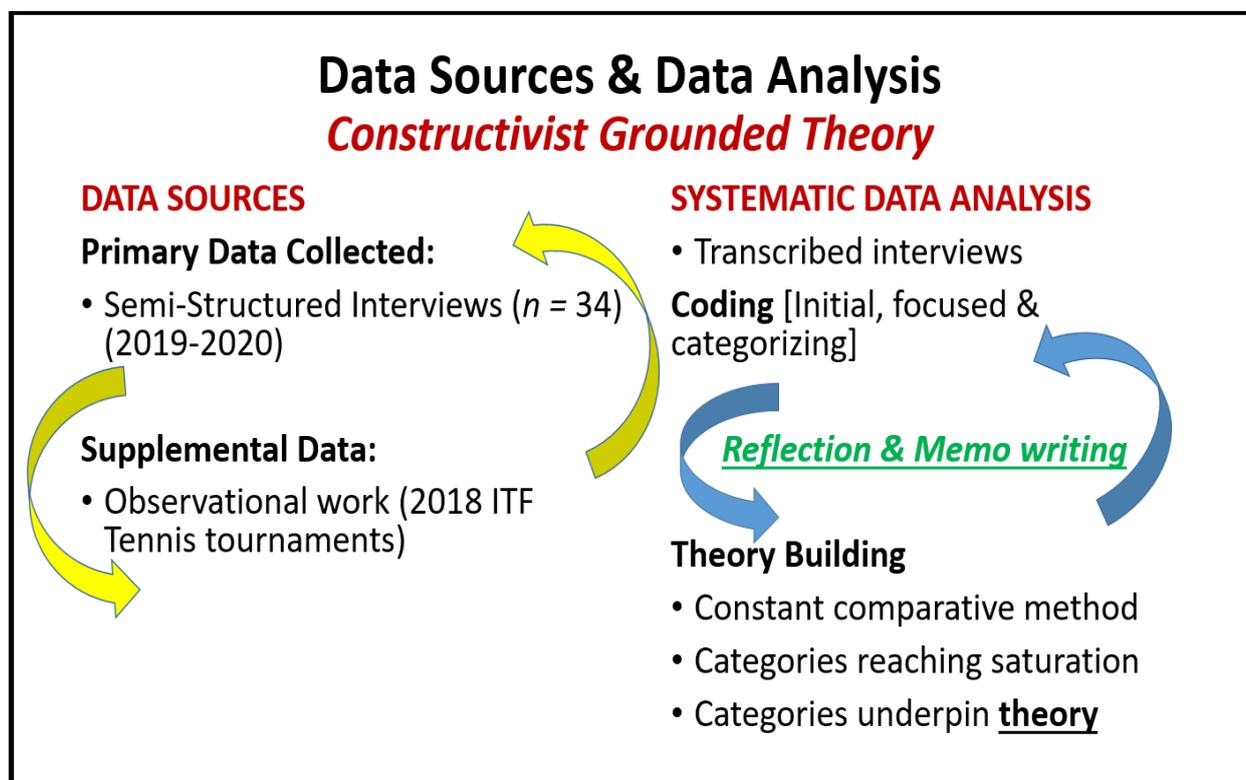


Figure 2.5. Mapping the constructivist methods package (adapted from Charmaz, 2014).

2.4.1. Sampling Strategies

In qualitative research designs, the researcher purposely selects participants and sites that are suited for providing insight, understanding and ultimately will help answer the central research question (Guetterman et al., In Preparation).

Research Question(s)

The central question for this exploratory study was:

1. What is happening in the development process of a promising competitive junior men's tennis player from the Western Cape, South Africa?

The sub-questions were:

1. What is happening [on and off the court] in the development of these players?
2. What are the transitional processes throughout the junior to senior career pathway and how do we understand these transitions?
3. How do men's tennis players [with a promising national junior ranking] transition out of the professional player pathway?

To best answer the respective research questions and sub-questions (outlined in Chapter 1, page 25), a range of tennis participants ($n = 34$) were selected using purposeful or purposive sampling (theoretical sampling) along with maximum variation sampling (Charmaz, 2006; 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Draucker et al., 2007; Guetterman et al., 2017). The tennis participants selected included: South African men's tennis players ($n = 22$), tennis parents ($n = 3$), tennis coaches ($n = 7$) and tennis administrators ($n = 2$).

Unlike selective sampling in other qualitative approaches, theoretical sampling in GT is directed by the emergent nature of the theory (Draucker et al., 2007). In other words, participants are selected based upon leads and hunches during the simultaneous data collection, analysis and memoing process – this feature is another flexible attribute to the approach that is useful in adapting the study along the way (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Draucker et al., 2007). Moreover, theoretical sampling leads to theoretical saturation, which means that no new explanations emerge from the categories. The tennis players ($n = 22$) were seen as the experts on their development and transition process and were prioritized on providing the best insight on the research questions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The other participants added value in the process of theory generation and were used as a sounding board to test out the emerging theory – a process in GT known as abduction (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014). Maximum variation sampling is another type of purposeful sampling where the participants selected differ in some of their traits (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The participants ($n = 34$) differed on two distinct

traits: age and role in tennis, i.e., tennis players, tennis coaches, tennis parents and tennis administration. The tennis players ($n = 22$), in particular differed on age range (18 - 30 years) and tennis playing experience (junior competitive, junior elite, semi-professional and professional).

Table 2.4 presents tennis player information. It is interesting to note that of the 22 players, 15 played different sports at school. Some players were more explicit on their sport choices than others were. It was clear, however, that rugby was the most popular sport among players outside of tennis. School tennis was also popular among players; 20 of the 22 players participated in school tennis throughout their schooling. The academy choice was also popular among players; 15 of the 22 players went to an academy in their junior career.

Table 2.4. Descriptive information on the tennis players (n = 22)

Minimum age	18 years
Maximum age	30 years
Mean starting age	6 years
Number of players who were home schooled	4
Highest Competitive Level	
Junior Competitive	3
Junior Elite	5
Semi-Professional	12
Professional	2
School tennis	20
Academy tennis	15
Tennis and other sports	15
Tennis only	7

2.4.2. Data Collection

Data collection occurred from 2018 – 2020. When conducting qualitative research, it is advisable to collect multiple forms of data throughout the course of the research project (Babchuk, 2019; Charmaz, 2006; 2014; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Considering this, and prior to the development of my semi-structured interview protocol, I deemed it appropriate to get a closer – court side – look at the context of the junior competitive tennis

environment (Babchuk, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The best way to do this was to be a courtside observer at three consecutive International Tennis Federation (ITF) Junior and Futures tournaments hosted in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. I submitted an amendment to my original ethics application. The Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee for Social, Behavioural and Educational Research approved the amendment before I entered the field. No persons were interviewed during this three-week period. My intent and focus was to be a quiet and intentional observer – listening and reflecting – on the sights and sounds of the competitive tennis environment as a whole (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My immersion as a fan in this environment left an indelible imprint on my perspective, which shed light on my own biases that I had developed as a competitive tennis player myself. I wrestled with these biases throughout the journey.

Full disclosure, I was heavily influenced by my preconceived idea (largely due to my understanding in Western literature on youth sport), that our tennis players were dropping out of tennis – giving up and quitting the sport. Considering this, I had initially conceptualized the central phenomenon of the study to be dropout. This understanding led me to correspond with the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC), Tennis South Africa (TSA) and Provincial representatives in the Western Cape, to try to understand tennis player trajectory of where our tennis players were / are. Especially after they complete High School. Considering this, and the correspondences that transpired, I followed the qualitative sampling strategies aforementioned to flesh out my hunches and ideas. The tennis players ($n = 22$) becoming more prioritized as experts on the topic of interest and suited to provide the best insight in answering the research questions (Charmaz, 2014). The process of focusing my study on the players themselves led me to understand and re-conceptualize the central phenomenon – no longer dropout, but transitions or the process of transitioning within and out of South African men's tennis. Figure 2.6 is an example of some field notes taken in December 2018 as a summary of what I was observing and experiencing in the field as a courtside observer. This work in the field set the stage for the interviews to follow.

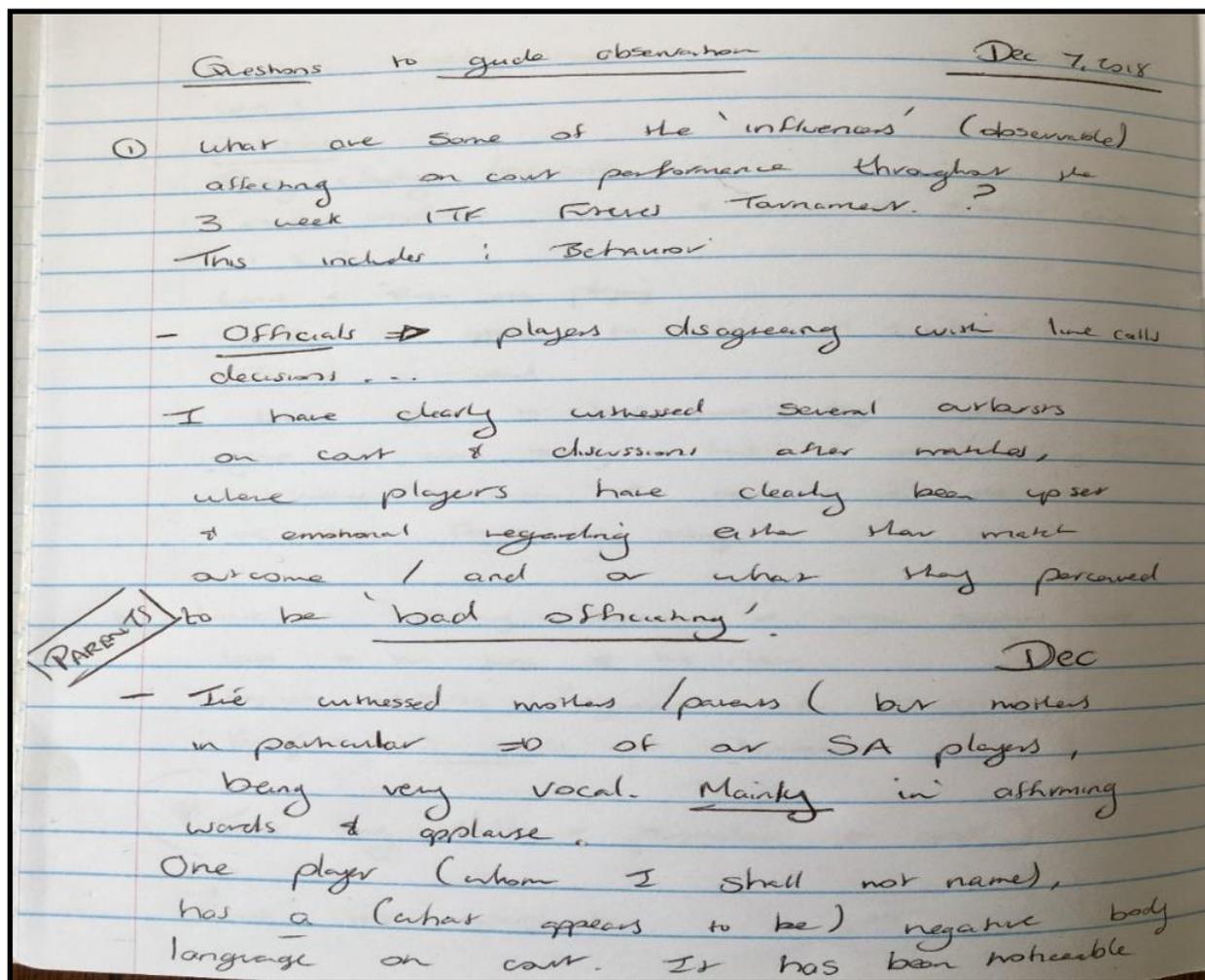


Figure 2.6. Memo/field notes from observational work as a court side observer (December 2018)

Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data collection. In-person and telephone interviews were conducted (2019-2020) with a range of tennis participants ($n = 34$): South African men's tennis players ($n = 22$), tennis parents ($n = 3$), tennis coaches ($n = 7$) and tennis administrators ($n = 2$). The development of the interview protocols was guided by research methodology texts on how to conduct qualitative interviews and what types of questions to ask, i.e., some open ended, some promoting rapport building, probing questions etc. (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each interview was digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. In addition, during the interviews, notes were taken which led to probing questions that helped me ask insightful, clarifying questions where needed. This all aided and encouraged the interviews to flow organically. Overall, the interviews provided a platform for me to connect with the

participants and for them to connect with me. My own competitive tennis playing experience as a former collegiate player in the United States of America (USA) helped with the connection and allowed me access to the tennis participants' world. During many of the interviews, I could sense there was trust being built, which allowed some vulnerable discussions to take place. I was allowed access to their worlds and their lived experiences in tennis. These rich, subjective experiences, both in tennis and out of tennis, provided depth of understanding to the context and meaning around development and transitions within South African men's tennis. Moreover, the note taking during the interviews helped me follow leads, which led to additional interviews with more tennis experts, as is suggested when conducting GT, i.e., theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014).

I found that my lead question, at the start of the interviews, was the most eye opening. The lead question being: 1) what is your relationship to tennis? Most tennis players, from my experience, seemed to immediately connect with their past and present selves – almost as if they were taken back in time to some vivid memories both on and off the court. It was interesting to note that this open-ended question seemed to give a sense of control to the participant in the interview, allowing participants to speak openly and candidly about their tennis experiences and journeys. The additional questions, in many instances, sounded repetitive as participants divulged so much in their answers to the lead question. The additional questions were, nonetheless, asked and helped provide clarity where needed. Please see Appendices B, C and D for the full interview protocol(s).

2.4.3. Data Analysis

All 34 semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Assistance was sought from a trusted colleague in the Department of Sport Science to help with some of the transcriptions. As the primary researcher, I chose not to use computer software for the data analysis process. I tried to remain as close to the data as possible by opting for a pen and paper approach. I did, however, use an excel spreadsheet to help with ordering the initial coding phase and memos around coding for each participant, an approach outlined by Saldana (2021). I have named this a data collection inventory which was generated in the form of an excel spreadsheet (adapted from Babchuk, 2019). This inventory helped make the research process, especially data collection and analysis, more tangible, for example, the process/activity of sorting through, revisiting, theorizing and checking myself against manageable data was useful. My reasons for

using an Excel spreadsheet are similar to Babchuk's (2019) in that this process provided a platform to "see the responses and codes for each question", which helped me notice "patterns and categories as they emerged from the data" (p. 10).

A constructivist coding system was followed during data analysis as suggested by Charmaz (2006; 2014). The two phases of coding consisted of constructing initial codes, which essentially labels segments of data. This was followed by focused coding – elevating initial codes to another analytical layer. Focused codes are codes that are most frequent within the data set and or seen as the most important when tested against data (Charmaz, 2014). According to Charmaz (2014), "focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes makes the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely" (p. 138).

GT utilizes constant comparative techniques where the researcher returns to the data to expound upon it and tease it apart to aid in the generation of the emergent theory (Charmaz, 2014). In my case, the immersion in the data and ongoing dance between participant's experiences and my interpretation/co-construction of them, helped throughout the analysis process (Babchuk, 2019; Charmaz, 2014). The analysis process consisted of initial coding (labelling) on the transcripts themselves with pencil – left hand margin for codes and right hand margin for memos (Charmaz, 2014; Hood, 2007). The memoing processes occurred throughout my research journey, however, specific memo's (asking analytic questions of the data) were written during the analysis process (Babchuk, 2019; Charmaz, 2014; Hood, 2007).

Figure 2.7 is an example of raw data and the process of initial coding and memo writing. Printed transcripts with narrow margins allowed for pencil and paper coding along with memos to take place directly on each transcript. Initial coding took place in the left hand margin and memo writing (asking analytic questions of the data and or grappling with meaning) took place in the right hand margin. This process was repeated with all interview transcripts ($n = 34$).

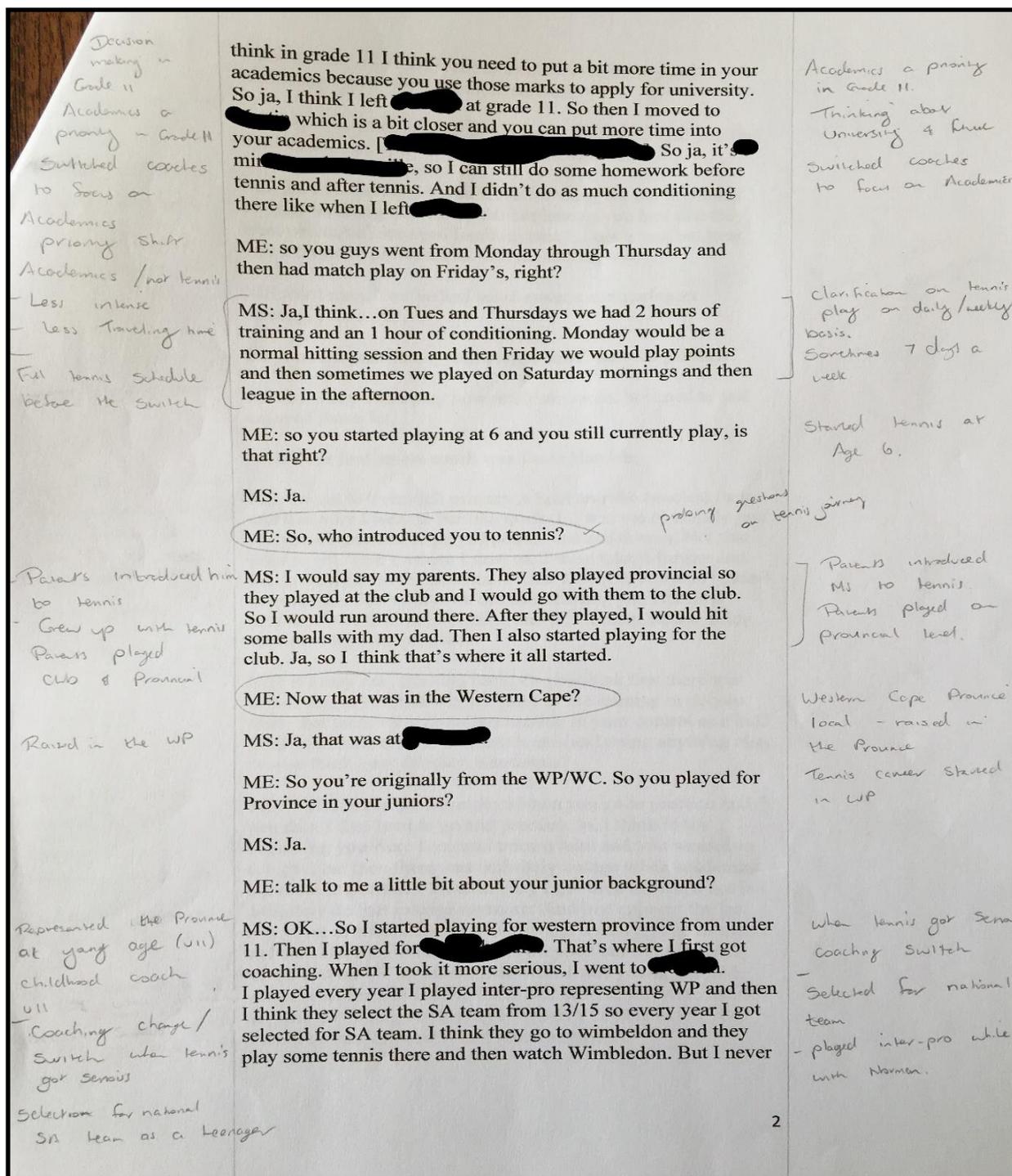


Figure 2.7. Example of the initial coding process with memos on interview transcript

Overall, two rounds of initial coding were done, along with one round of focused coding. Major categories were clustered to represent the most relevant codes (Babchuk, 2019; Charmaz, 2014). Throughout the process of data analysis, questions were asked of the data which helped move the process forward from initial coding to focused coding and then onto categories and eventually

theory building – categories underpinning the theoretical explanation (Babchuk, 2019; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Figure 2.8 is an example of returning to the data and fleshing out the explanation(s) in the form of memo's in my methodological journal. This process helped with theory building throughout the data analysis phases.

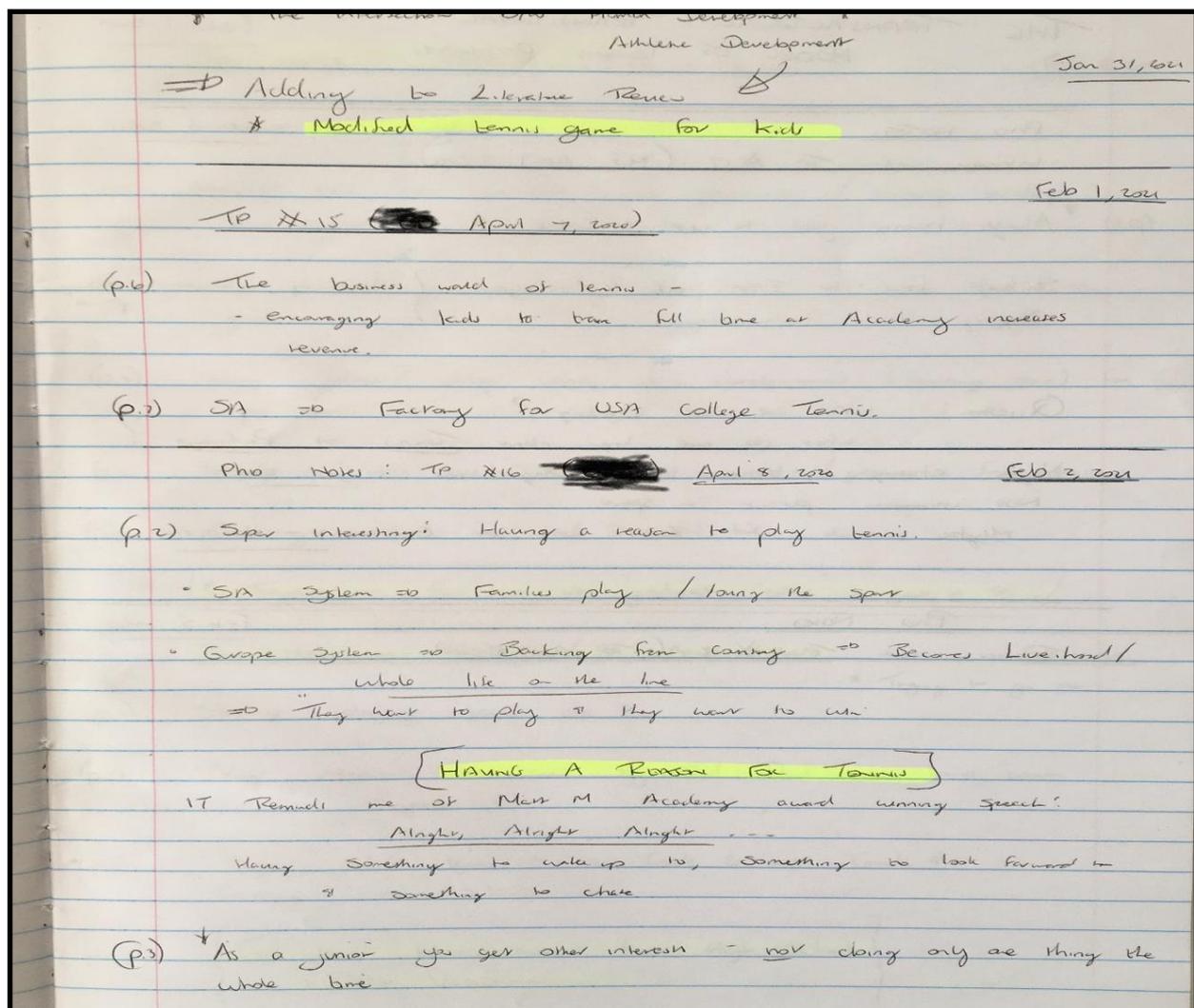


Figure 2.8. Example of a memo: Asking analytic questions of the data to move forward in the coding process

Figure 2.9 is a snapshot of my initial theory-building phase, i.e., the process of elevating focused codes to categories and categories providing insight to the theoretical explanation. This process seemed to take on a life of its own as I moved back and forth between the coding phases, revisited some early memos, and tested data against data (Babchuk, 2019).

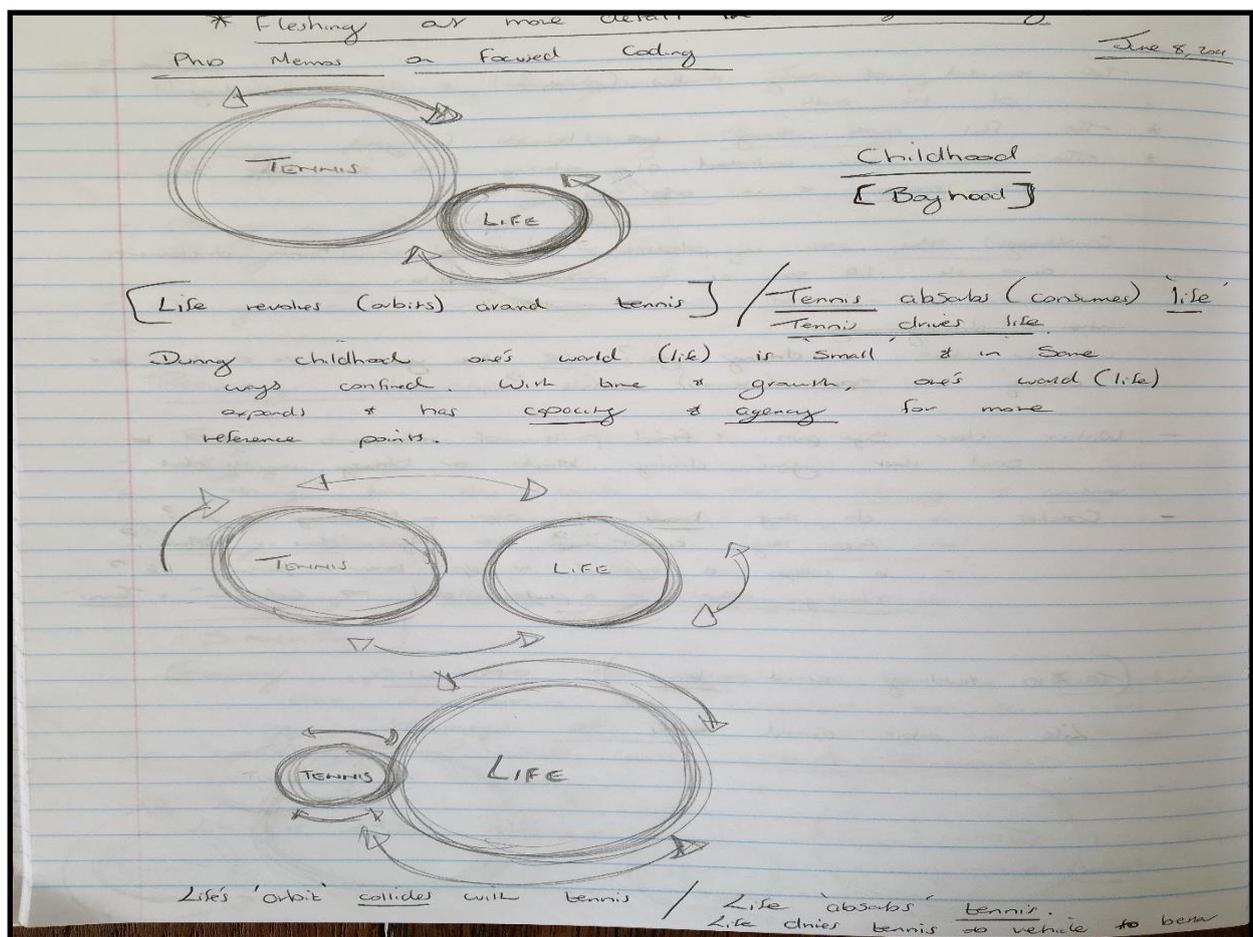


Figure 2.9. Theory building: Elevating focused codes to categories and categories to theory

Abduction in GT is a concept used to describe the process of testing an emerging theory against the data somewhat deductively (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014). Not all scholars agree with this approach to theory generation. Some scholars reject abduction and advocate for a more inductive approach (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). In my study, the theoretical explanation generated was a mixture of inductive and deductive approaches, i.e., co-construction. I chose to stick closely to the recommended data analysis guidelines for GT during the data analysis phases (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). For example, I prioritized and focused my attention on the tennis players themselves as they were deemed the primary experts on the phenomenon. I iteratively weaved in and out of the data analysis phase with the players and used constant comparative methods; comparing data within transcripts and between transcripts. Once I had gone through two rounds of initial coding, and elevated the focused codes to categories, and started theory building, I went back into the larger data set. I specifically revisited the experiences and meanings described, interpreted and co-constructed from the coaches, parents and tennis administration and

put the emerging theory to the test, i.e., abduction. In true GT fashion, I asked of the data and of myself: What is happening here? What is the larger story? (Charmaz, 2014).

Using the eight categories underpinning the emerging theoretical explanation, I looked for similarities and differences from the other tennis participants, i.e., coaches, parents, administrators who had knowledge of the central phenomenon and compared them to the eight categories and four sub-categories (please see chapter three and section 3.2 for more detail). The tennis players themselves experienced the phenomenon, so it made sense to focus the first part of theory building on these participants. However, the overall experience and different perspectives from the other participants helped provide depth and context on the phenomenon in South African junior tennis. It made sense to use abduction, i.e., a form of deduction, on this part of the sample to check if the emerging explanation was congruent with the larger story and context. The abduction process was used as a built in strategy to not only help with theory generation but as a way of critiquing methodological congruency, systematic rigor and overall trustworthiness of the study (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

2.4.4. Trustworthiness: Validity, Reliability and Credibility

Validity is a term used in quantitative research. The appropriate term used in qualitative research is trustworthiness to denote a similar principle. Other quantitative terms that are associated with assessing the quality and integrity of a study are reliability and generalizability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Due to the long, rich history associated with quantitative research, early qualitative researchers were somewhat confined to quantitative assessment criteria to assess the integrity and quality of their work. This was limiting to qualitative research as the underlying philosophical worldview, purpose and overall research process differs from quantitative strategies (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In the 1980's, qualitative researchers Lincoln and Guba (1985), presented terms that helped redefine quality checks in qualitative research and the criteria used to assess the integrity and quality of work. Consequently, qualitative research and the criteria used to assess integrity, quality and value has evolved over the years (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Several notable qualitative scholars are credited in the literature for their pioneering work (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz &

Thornberg, 2021; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lincoln et al., 2011; Lichtman, 2013; Tracy, 2013).

The term trustworthiness has been widely used in qualitative research and has become a valuable reference point for qualitative assessment criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Trustworthiness in qualitative research is a broad term encompassing validity, reliability and credibility (Guetterman et al., In Preparation). In other words, the researcher can ask of themselves and the research, can the procedures and outcomes of the study be trusted? In addition, are they credible in speaking to the research question and providing a detailed explanation of the systematic research process followed? (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A number of scholars have weighed in on assessment criteria for qualitative research (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Guetterman et al., In Preparation). This has led to ongoing discussion and a number of guidelines / procedural checklists providing an armchair walk through/ critique of the integrity and quality of one's work. Reading through the literature and attending workshops on research methodology (as mentioned previously) helped me take a critical stance on evaluating my own work. Moreover, following trustworthiness procedures and checking my work against them kept me accountable throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Throughout my study, I employed trustworthiness strategies and referred to them as I moved through the research process. An example of this is my utilization of one GT variant. I followed this variant along with the recommended strategies from Charmaz (2014) from the beginning to end. I also adopted maximum variation sampling as a sampling strategy, which helped provide context to the research topic, i.e., selecting a range of tennis participants with different traits. Building this strategy into my study, helped me follow leads and then ask analytic questions of the data at the theory building phase of data analysis using abduction, i.e., testing out the emerging theoretical explanation against data from coaches, parents and tennis administration. These strategies agree with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for checking validity, i.e., credibility. Theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation strategies helped solidify the overall trustworthiness of my study as well (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

After consulting the literature on assessment criteria for GT studies, it became evident that not all scholars utilised this approach to its full capacity. "Cherry-picking" is used to describe scholars

who have used some of the GT strategies, but not the full complement of the method/approach (Holt, 2016, p. 31). Holt (2016) suggested that if undertaken authentically, GT is the result of both a process and a product, in other words, a “total methodology” from start to finish (p. 24). It is advisable that when conducting research, irrespective of research design employed, that the primary researcher systematically holds their work accountable. The training I received in research methodology was underpinned by a Creswellian approach to the research process, i.e., using procedural checklists to guide and encourage a systematic and rigorous approach (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Following practical examples in the literature and deferring to assessment guidelines helped me stay accountable in the research journey, i.e., process to product.

Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) proposed their own assessment rubric, i.e., “flexible guidelines” which consists of 13 items for determining the overall quality of GT studies (p. 17-18). According to Charmaz and Thornberg (2021), a general rubric of assessment should not be applied to GT studies. This is due to the different variants adopted in the approach; each underpinned by different philosophical lenses, which translates into different techniques employed for data collection and data analysis. For assessing constructivist GT, four components are taken into consideration: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). The credibility criterion, specifically asks the researcher to take a transparent and reflexive stance. As discussed earlier in this chapter, I have remained transparent with my confessional tales and researcher positioning. This agrees with the credibility criteria and aids in the overall quality of the study and assessment thereof (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Furthermore, and relating my work to the GT assessment criteria outlined by Charmaz and Thornberg (2021), the gathering of rich data along with systematically weaving in and out of the data, helped me ask analytic questions of the data. I remained open to change and the possibility of having to adapt my study as I followed leads. This is evident in the progression of the study, i.e., moving away from dropout and following leads that provided context and depth on the transition process of South African junior tennis players.

Member checking is considered important in the process of trustworthiness (Babchuk, 2019; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Guetterman et al., In Preparation). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) suggested taking the findings and emerging theoretical explanation to the participants and consulting them. For example, asking them if the interpretation and co-construction adequately

reflect the participants' experiences and stories. This trustworthiness strategy, has been questioned by Smith and McGannon (2018), regarding the congruency of the epistemological and ontological stance adopted by the researcher. Moreover, member checking has been challenged as a "verification method" as the researcher cannot guarantee that participants will fully engage or reengage with the findings as presented to them (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p. 106). To the point of member checking as a quality check and rigor, I am hesitant to denounce the perceived value of returning to the participants, i.e., the experts and engage with them regarding their individual and collective voice. I recognize and appreciate that Smith and McGannon (2018) have provided insight on the advancement of qualitative research in terms of striving for and maintaining rigor. However, to remain true to my own study, training and the trustworthiness strategies employed, I returned to the tennis player participants and presented my findings to them. This was done telephonically. More specifically, I meticulously presented the major categories to the participants and asked the following questions of them:

1. Do the major categories capture your voice in your own tennis journey?
2. After listening to the categories presented, is there anything you would like to expound upon, add or subtract?

I was encouraged to learn that the participants confirmed that their individual stories (voices) were captured and presented in the collective – major categories.

In terms of reliability, an evaluation checklist was collated from the literature of Creswell and Guetterman (2019) and used as a rubric for my supervisory team (Promotor and Co-promotor) to check and evaluate the systematic procedures employed in my GT study. Table 2.5 is the evaluation checklist used in this process adapted from Creswell and Guetterman (2019) on evaluating GT work. Moreover, the data collection inventory (mentioned earlier) was another way to establish reliability with my supervisory team (Promotor and Co-promotor) as a means of transparency, credibility and accountability. For example, during our online supervisory team meetings, my promotors were able to view my Excel spreadsheet (via screen share) and ask specific questions regarding the various phases of analysis. I collated a large database within Excel during the coding and the theory building phases. This was used to check my work and assess the methodological congruency from process to product. After all, the end result of a GT study is to produce a theoretical explanation / model grounded in data. This is another criterion for assessing the quality and trustworthiness of GT work (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Table 2.5. Evaluation checklist (rubric) for Grounded Theory research (adapted from Creswell and Guetterman, 2019)

Criteria	High Quality	Low Quality
Identification of process and action being studied	Process and action clearly identified in purpose statement and model	No identification – vagueness regarding the links between theory and process
Generates a theory	At the end of the study, there is an advancement of a theoretical model – discussion, a visual or set of hypotheses	No explanation of the theory of process or action. The reader is left to wonder how the process is theoretically explained
Links throughout the study between data, categories and theory	Summary statements are provided at the end of the study making the links explicit	No explanation of the links in process between data, categories and theory building – this relationship is unclear to the reader
Use of memos in the procedures	Memo procedures are discussed in the methods section	No presentation/visual display of memo procedures and the links to categories and theory generation are unclear.
Visual display of theoretical model is presented in the report	Presentation of visual model and then discussion of action and process being studied. Links between the parts of the process/action are clearly represented (model) and discussed.	No presentation or visual display of theoretical model/explanation. The reader is left to wonder how the discussion of the process fits together in a theoretical explanation
One Grounded Theory variant is selected	Researcher makes mention of the variant employed with references to literature	No explicit explanation of the variant used in the process.

Lastly, the training I received through the research methodology short courses, encouraged me to weave in and out of the various guides on trustworthiness throughout the process. These practical guides and procedural checklists are found in the literature which I consulted (Babchuk, 2019; Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The following strategies were employed to guide rigor and trustworthiness: Considerable time in data collection and analysis, researcher positioning (explicit stance on philosophy, qualitative design, approach, and auto-ethnography), peer review and audit trail (check in with supervisory team – arm chair walk through of methods employed), thick descriptions and interpretation / co-construction from data, maximum variation (a varied selection of participants were selected to answer the research questions) and member checking (Babchuk, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

2.4.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are not an afterthought nor are they adhered to simply by addressing a checklist. Adopting an ethical stance from the beginning of a study and throughout the process is recommended (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Examples of my ethical stance are presented throughout the dissertation and specifically in this chapter. This transparent position underpins my trustworthiness, the trustworthiness of the study and ethical responsibility. Creswell (2009) presented several practical examples of designing a congruent research study guided by the research design and underlying philosophical worldview. One such scenario can be drawn from my own work in designing this Ph.D. project. Table 2.6 is a snap shot of the larger inventory of data and metrics I logged over time.

So, why is Table 2.6 important and what does it have to do with ethical considerations? Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that the ethical stance of the primary researcher influences the trustworthiness of the study and the outcome thereof. Considering this and prior to ethics approval, I wrestled with my own research philosophy and finding the best fit for my study (see previous sections in this chapter). The systematic and rigorous approach I adopted early on in the research journey helped me remain accountable, trustworthy and ethical throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was sought from my Institution's Research Ethics Committee (SU-HSD-004442), please see Appendix E and Appendix D. Data collection commenced only after the study was ethically approved and took place during the approved timeframe.

Table 2.6. Inventory of qualitative data: Methodology and methods

A total methodology: Qualitative data inventory								
Research philosophy	Research design and strategy	Purposeful sampling strategies	Participants (n = 34)	Data collection tools	Data collection timeline	Data analysis	Trust worthiness [validation strategies]	Ethical considerations
Constructivism	Qualitative	Max Variation (age, tennis relationship, playing ability)	Men's tennis players (n = 22)	Observational (Supplemental data)	ITF Tournament Observation 2018	Two rounds of Initial Coding [transcripts & Excel spreadsheet]	Member checking (sharing findings and receiving confirmation)	Approval granted by Institutional ethics committee
	Grounded Theory (Constructivist)	Theoretical Sampling	Coaches (n = 7)	Semi-structured Interviews (Primary data)	Interviews 2019 - 2020	Focused Coding	Coder reliability Checks (Supervisory Review)	All participants provided written consent prior to data collection
			Parents (n = 3)			Eight categories generated from focused codes	Systematic and rigorous process [Deferring to expert protocols/ check-lists for guidance]	Ethically approved timeline was adhered to for data collection
			Admin (n = 2)			Theoretical Explanation (underpinned categories)	Researcher positioning and Transparency	All participants were assigned labels, e.g., TP 1 is Tennis Player 1
						Memo writing throughout research process and data collection and analysis	Training in research methodology throughout research process [workshops]	
						All hand coding (Paper and Excel Spreadsheet) No software		

2.5. Summary

The South African tennis player is conceptualized as the central figure – the protagonist or lead character – in this qualitative study. It is hoped that the reader will be introduced to and become well acquainted with the person as the protagonist. Ironically, the person and performer are one in the same. However, greater attention is given to the developing person and their transitioning experiences while playing the sport of tennis.

My position as the instrument is a unique attribute to this study (Babchuk, 2019). Moreover, my training in behavioural health sciences as well as my philosophical stance in this research project has informed my approach to firstly, identify the gap in youth sport literature – placing emphasis on understanding the developing *person (tennis player)* in the South African tennis context rather than merely identifying relationships between quantitative data and describing the variables of the *performer (ITF ranking milestones, etc.)*. Secondly, by adopting a qualitative research design, which is congruent with the social constructivist worldview, I, as the research instrument, was better equipped to answer the research question(s) identified and in so doing co-construct a GT with the experts (the participants) on the process of transitioning within and out of men's tennis in the Western Cape, South Africa.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from my qualitative grounded theory (GT) study on South African men's tennis players and their transitions within the sport as well as their transitioning out of the professional player pathway. Before I present the findings, let me review the research questions that guided the research process.

Research Question(s)

The central question for this exploratory study was:

1. What is happening in the development process of a promising competitive junior men's tennis player from the Western Cape, South Africa?

The sub-questions were:

1. What is happening [on and off the court] in the development of these players?
2. What are the transitional processes throughout the junior to senior career pathway and how do we understand these transitions?
3. How do men's tennis players [with a promising national junior ranking] transition out of the professional player pathway?

3.1. Finding the shoe that fits: South African men's tennis player transition processes within and out of the professional player pathway

The GT model that explains South African men's tennis player transition processes within and out of the professional player pathway are presented in Figure 3.1. To remain true to the constructivist variant, a variant known for interest in actions and incidences of social processes being explored, I chose to represent this in a conceptual figure. To be clear, Charmaz (2014) does not use figures, however, other scholars conducting GT strategies do (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Figure 3.1 intends to draw the reader's attention to the social processes of development and transitions occurring over time and in a non-linear path. This model was generated from the iterative process of memoing, constant comparison between and within interview transcripts, the subsequent initial codes, focused codes, categories, as well as abduction and is, intended to depict movement and action.

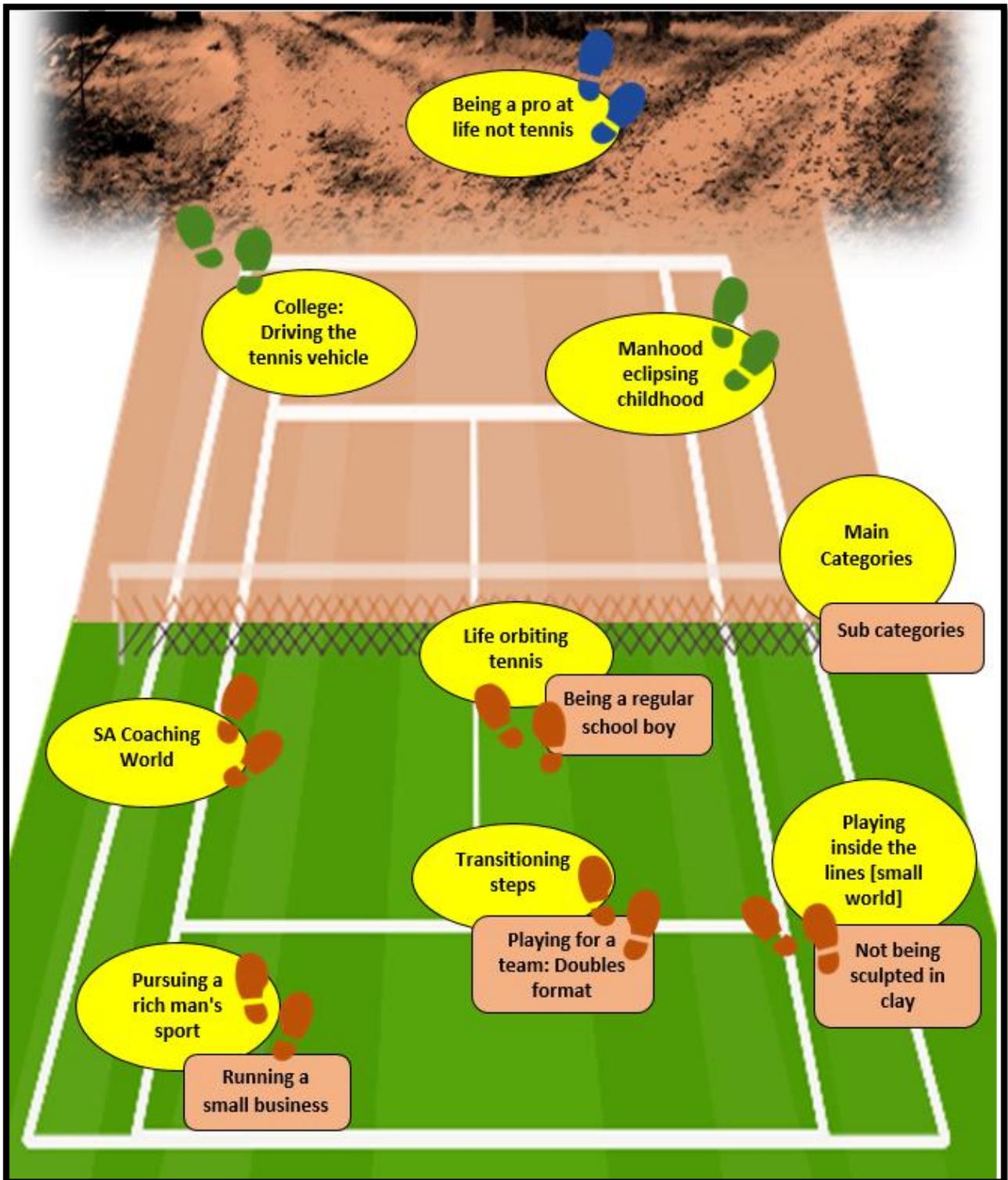


Figure 3.1: South African men's tennis player transition processes within and out of the professional player pathway

Figure 3.1 intends to capture and depict the dynamic, ongoing development and transitioning process experienced by South African men's tennis players within the South African tennis context. This process is illustrated and presented using gerunds (action words) in the eight categories, movement of the feet, the two tone coloured tennis courts. The green side of the court represents the South African tennis context (hard court) and the red side, the international tennis court (clay court) and, the eventual crossroads or pathways in the distance. These pathways illustrate future directions of young tennis players growing up in the tennis environment and then moving into something else and / or continuing with tennis. Collectively, this represents the complexity of the South African tennis environment from the perspective of South African tennis stakeholders, i.e., the tennis players themselves, the coaches, the parents and tennis administration. Further detail will be expounded upon as I unpack the categories that underpin the model.

3.1.1. Theory development: Grounded in the data

Important concepts are deemed to be relevant in the process of theory generation if they become increasingly evident throughout the data analysis phases (Lynch, 2016). In other words, do certain concepts stand out within the interview transcripts and observational transcripts? In this study, a number of recurring concepts were observed throughout the data analysis phases, which led to the generation of eight main categories and four sub-categories. The categories underpinning the theoretical explanation, along with some focused codes informing them, are presented in Table 3.1.

I chose to use a combination of figures, tables and narrative storytelling to present the categories in more detail while still maintaining the flow of action and processes. Moreover, it must be stated that my observational work in 2018, has augmented and supported the categories and helped in the process of theoretical generation. Not only was abduction used to cross-check and test the emerging theory against the experiences of coaches, parents and administrators, abduction was also employed to flesh out and cross-check what I had learned and observed from tennis players in the field – court side (Babchuk 2019; Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An example of this can be seen in category two, transitioning steps. Two focused codes that stand out and underpin this category are: 1) Getting stuck in Futures tournaments and, 2) using the doubles format to help with singles. Both these focused codes, when tested against my observational work, support the overarching category of transitioning steps.

Table 3.1. Generating categories from focused codes

CATEGORY 1	CATEGORY 2	CATEGORY 3	CATEGORY 4	CATEGORY 5	CATEGORY 6	CATEGORY 7	CATEGORY 8
Pursuing a rich man's sport	Transitioning steps	Playing inside the lines[small world]	SA coaching world	Life orbiting tennis	College: Driving the tennis vehicle	Manhood eclipsing childhood	Being a pro at life not tennis
"Tennis is a rich man's sport"	Not knowing the next steps	"Thinking you are good in SA"	SA coaches not current on tour	Juggling tennis and school	Wanting a chance at a better life	Reality check	Weighing up the cost
"Struggling to break even"	Using college tennis as development step	"Realizing you are not good enough"	Not knowing steps for pro tennis	Rushing to and fro	Using tennis to get into College	Growing up and Thinking about the future	Wanting a normal life
Struggling to pay for travel	Getting stuck in Futures tournaments	Playing next level tennis	Pushing college tennis	Packing too much into a day	Package deal: education & tennis	Wanting to do other things	Retiring childhood dream
Not being supported by Federation (TSA)	Needing competition to improve	USA college is next level	Former college players turned coaches	Chasing childhood dream [fantasy vs reality]	College tennis is litmus test. Not aspiring for pro tennis	Needing to be self-sufficient	Using tennis networks as life networks
Paying out of pocket	Not knowing the next steps	Being shocked at overseas professional set-up; i.e., players/academies	Not working together	Sacrificing normal childhood	Pro tennis too tough [risky]	Wanting a job that pays	Investing in life long tennis relationships
Discussing College for sponsors and support	Using doubles format to help with singles	SA players not knowing what it takes	Not providing development as collective [trying to retain players for own Academy]	Leaving home too early	More economical for family	Needing reference points [looking for examples to help in decision making]	Playing tennis for fun

Juniors (collectively) deciding college is more doable	Needing clay to help development of game	SA tennis world too small	Players needing sparring partners	Tennis becoming a job as a kid	Best of both worlds	Realizing the sacrifice for family [parents investment]	Talking business on court, i.e., networking
Realizing two routes: Pro vs College	Wanting to continue playing [not sure on steps]	Learning pushing game style on hard court	Not exposing kids to other game styles	Feeling the pressure	World class facilities and getting support	Realizing the lonely life on tour and sacrifices	Being employed through long-term tennis relationships
Pro route too expensive	Needing more local tournaments	Playing one dimensional tennis	Needing to develop 'holistic game'	Home schooling for tennis	Playing best in the world	Not wanting to miss out on family life and friends	Coaching and giving back
International tours too expensive	Needing more moneyed tournaments	Not realizing level of competition overseas	Kids are taught to push in juniors	Needing to accommodate tennis schedule	Having an incentive to play	Wanting to play other sports	Transitioning out of childhood (dreaming) into manhood (reality and responsibilities)
Paying for training and travel	Thinking of college tennis as a transition (development step)	Not realizing what it takes in reality	Pushing style, i.e., a way to prevent losing	Parents sacrificing	Playing for a team	Pursuing other interests	Wanting a regular job that pays
Being mindful, i.e., realizing financial burden on parents	Tennis migration, i.e., needing to be where the tennis is	Being exposed to international level and feeling overwhelmed ["eye opening"]	Not knowing how to win	Tennis is life	Focusing on ITF ranking for college tennis	Wanting to be less intense	Not wanting a pro tennis career

Considering college route as investment [paying for education and a better life]	Not having reference point of Pro to follow his steps	Not taught mental side	Juggling too many sports	Having fall back [investing in future]	Focusing on studies for University	Being grateful for tennis opportunities and setting up/planning for future
Needing major backing for pro route [small business venture]	Coaches and mates retelling college stories [following them]	Needing more professional environment [competitive collaborations]		College tennis becoming standard =success	Fatiguing/ Burning out [playing intensely as a kid]	Learning lessons through tennis for life
Sponsors wanting returns on investment, i.e., pressure to perform				College tennis is development step [testing oneself, measuring stick]		
SUB-CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY			
Running a small business: Pro tennis	Playing for a team: Doubles format	Not being sculpted in clay	Being a regular school boy			
Making an investment	Having fun	Never playing on clay	Wanting to focus on school work			
Considering the cost	Feeling less pressure	Not having facilities in SA	Wanting to play rugby/following in Dad's footsteps			
Considering the time	Feeling less alone	Recognizing the art and science	Playing team sports in school			
Not having the know how	Being supported	Developing as a whole player	Deciding not to home school			

Needing to make a profit	Someone having your back	Learning patience	Thinking about University - needing to study
Sponsors needing a return on investment	Having an incentive to play	Learning strategy / not just heavy hitting	Missing out on school life and friends
"Needing to manage child like a small business commodity"	Winning means more	Learning to think	Wanting to enjoy last few years of high school
Feeling the pressure	Playing for the team not just yourself	Learning shot selection	Falling behind in school work
Having much on the line - needing to win to keep sponsors	Feeling team support (college doubles)	Realizing tennis is so much more than aesthetics	Being influenced by team sports culture
Not being mentored	Playing for the point (college doubles)	Needing to play international events on unfamiliar surface	Dealing with conflicts between coaches and school sport
Needing to be shown how	Finding purpose and incentive to play and win	Not performing well on clay	Wanting memorable high school experience e.g., friends other sport
Needing support team with skill sets (who have done it before)	Being pushed to do better/ sparring and having a hitting partner	Europeans having the clay court advantage	School boy sport culture
Needing to sacrifice			Tennis not a highlight of school career

Reflecting on my time in the field, I observed that the qualifying event – pre-tournament – was a hurdle for many of the younger players. Losing in the qualifying rounds meant that these players could not play in the main draw unless they received wild cards. This meant that they would need to wait around for a whole week, potentially without playing matches, until the next tournament began on the following weekend. Considering this, and the need to get matches in, some players signed up for the doubles format of the ITF Future’s events. The doubles format provided more match play opportunities, was another avenue of earning (ranking) points and kept the players, potentially, in the tournament for longer while waiting on the next tournament to begin the following weekend – providing another shot at qualifying for singles.

Considering the holistic data collection and data analysis strategies employed, I have presented the findings in this section as an all-inclusive report with special attention given to the tennis player experience of the central phenomenon. Moreover, the eight categories is the foundation on which the theoretical model is built and supported. In order to remain true to the ethical mandate that I have observed throughout the study, not all codes and or quotes from participants have been included in this section as they may jeopardize the anonymity of the participants.

3.1.2. Walking through the theoretical model: One category at a time

At the proposal stage of this study, as mentioned previously, the central phenomenon was understood and conceptualized as dropout, or the decision-making around dropout in tennis. Once in the field, and thinking through the subjective nature of qualitative research and the GT variant employed, I started to recognise and appreciate the complexity of the larger story as experienced by the tennis players themselves from childhood, adolescence and into adulthood (Babchuk 2019; Charmaz, 2014; Guetterman et al., (In Preparation)).

Let us start this story from the beginning as co-constructed with the experts, i.e., the tennis players. Imagine for a moment you are standing on a green tennis court somewhere in the Western Cape, South Africa. The court you are on is a hard court, the playing surface for tennis courts across the country. Your age is roughly six years old. Why six years old? Well, according to the descriptive statistics collected from the tennis players ($n = 22$), the average age for starting tennis across all participants is six years. Now, put your pair of tennis shoes on. Excellent. This pair of shoes is your first pair of tennis shoes; there are eight pairs (eight categories) in this story with an

additional four pairs (four sub-categories). The four sub-categories are not stand-alone categories, but rather are linked to and help broaden the understanding of four main categories in particular. This is expounded upon in more detail when each category is unpacked in order.

For most kids, being fitted with their first pair of tennis shoes is an important undertaking. Often times, to save on money and because of a pending growth spurt, opting for a bigger shoe size is the better option. I can almost hear the proverbial voice of a parent, while standing in line at check out, exclaim, “Ag, he’ll grow into them!” *Grow* or *growing*, are poignant action words used in this story. These words fortify the categories and are recurring actions throughout the larger story; moreover, they are pivotal in really understanding the theoretical model in detail.

All right, let us head back to the court with your first pair of tennis shoes. These shoes, in this story, represent the categories as presented in order of actions. Sticking closely with the analogy of a proverbial tennis match, each category represents a specific action in time – on the court as depicted in Figure 3.1. Starting near the baseline, moving in a non-linear pattern, the categories almost take on a life of their own as they reveal the steps or transitional movement patterns of South African men’s tennis players in their tennis journey. All eight categories and four sub-categories (embedded) are listed separately and explained in detail below.

1. Pursuing a rich man’s sport

Tennis, as an individual sport, is considered an expensive sport. Taking up the sport is generally not too expensive. All that is required in the under 10’s age groups is an appropriate size junior racquet, which can be bought at a fairly low cost along with regular athletic shoes. The exorbitant costs start accumulating as seriousness of training and competitiveness increases with age. Most participants noted a shift in their competitive mind-set; as they got older, their tennis pursuit became more serious. Players mentioned changing coaches throughout their junior careers as well, and many times this was a result of wanting to improve their game. Some players opted for more of a structured, professional style approach provided by tennis academies. Others opted to continue with their high school set-up and not join an academy. In this scenario, tennis, a popular school sport in their school, was well supported and had a high standard of quality coaching and depth in their players, i.e., groups, squads. For some schools in South Africa, this is not the case. In these schools, the school sport structure and culture prioritize team sports over individual

sports, i.e., tennis. Rugby and cricket are examples of South African sports that draw a lot of attention and participation in school, especially in all boy schools. Many players revealed this tension in their decision-making around tennis participation.

The commitment to the academy set-up sometimes entailed extra travel, which incurred extra expenses on the family. In addition, tournaments would need to be played over weekends and some would be far afield. All of which incurred extra expense. Participants throughout the interviewing process would continually draw my attention back to the financial aspect of the sport. One participant reflected on the sad reality of the sport in South Africa, and stated, “I’m seeing players fall away due to financial reasons” (TP 6). He continued to drive home the message that South African players are talented, but they need the backing to continue playing. He suggested that more scholarships are needed for our tennis players in South Africa (TP 6).

When asked about the professional tennis pathway, and steps in pursuing this route from the Western Cape, another participant responded with, “there is no way you can be a tennis player without money or financial backing. NO way!” Needing the money and the international exposure are two BIG things, he claimed. He boldly summed up his thoughts on the necessity of finances to continue with tennis stating, “If you can’t do it properly, then you shouldn’t do it at all” (TP 2).

Many participants concluded that money is a big issue in South African tennis. In particular, the aspect of making an investment or investing in a player’s tennis pursuit was a recurring topic of interest and concern. Families would need to make huge financial sacrifices to ensure that their tennis playing kids have the best opportunities of succeeding in the sport. The topic of financial support coming from South Africa’s tennis federation, Tennis South Africa (TSA), was discussed on several occasions. The participants expected TSA to do more for our players. Some areas of assisting could be achieved by way of sponsorships, paying for overseas travel and / or providing more coverage of players to attract interest from private investors.

To flesh out this main category in more detail, a sub-category was identified and clusters of focused codes were grouped under this recurring concept, which is labelled: Running a small business: Pro tennis. This sub-category focuses on the pursuit of the professional tennis pathway, especially when pursued from the Western Cape, South Africa.

As one participant eloquently stated, “money is not something everybody has”. He went on to point out, that the professional tennis pathway is tough for players coming from South Africa. Tennis pathways, he concluded, “are dependent on resources” (TP 14). Another participant, a tennis coach, shared an early experience with a tennis parent who suggested that his tennis playing child was, as he put it, “a commodity that needs to be managed” (C 1). This business style jargon, with reference to the professional player pathway, was noted throughout the interviewing process and was seen as a fundamental ingredient of making it on the professional tennis tour.

It was noted that if and when, players were presented with competitive opportunities, they would need to capitalize on these opportunities to improve ranking and try to earn some money from playing professional tournaments on the ITF tour. This phase, in particular, was considered challenging for many younger South African tennis players, as they would need to travel internationally to play ITF tournaments – either on the continent or abroad. Moreover, many players would need to “pay out of pocket” – well, their parent’s pocket (TP 20). Several participants expounded even more on the lonely aspect of the sport when needing to traverse the African continent for matches and international exposure. One participant reminded me, that the touring experience was many times a “lonely one and pressure ridden”. He shared how his tennis performances on the international circuit could sway his sponsors – winning was seen as a pivotal part to retain these investors, which added to the “pressures on tour” (TP 2). Finally, and to drive the category of pursuing a rich man’s sport home, another participant reflected on the purpose of professional tennis, which inevitably would need to become a job and be profitable. He reminded me that professional tennis is “making money off tennis” (C 5).

In sum, chasing a tennis dream of becoming the next South African professional tennis player on the ATP tour is an exorbitant undertaking, almost akin to starting up and running a small business venture. A venture requiring large amounts of capital with ‘no return’ on investment for several years. Moreover, a venture needing to be funded mostly out of pocket, with no support – for the most part – from the tennis federation, Tennis South Africa (TSA).

2. Transitioning steps

In keeping with the larger story and following the flow depicted in the theoretical model in Figure 3.1, let us change our pair of shoes for another pair. This time we have moved inside the court,

inside the baseline to be exact. In tennis, this stance could be seen as an attacking, aggressive or even an anticipating stance. In this analogy, however, there is an appearance of knowing one's game or next steps, but in reality, from the collective voice (stance) of the players, there is uncertainty around the next steps or transitioning steps in the tennis pathway(s) within the South African tennis environment.

In category one, the financial aspect was identified as a pivotal ingredient to tennis development and continuance in the sport. Category two, however, unpacks the transitioning steps or lack thereof in the South African tennis environment. As one participant asserted, "it (South Africa) lacks the next steps" (TP 15). Another participant was more specific about the topic of developing steps and transition steps and suggested, there was a plateau from a certain age at junior level tennis where there are no "next steps for older juniors" (TP 6). For players to improve their tennis they need to strategically find competition and match play. A recurring topic, and / or point of contention discussed, was the need for more exposure to different opponents, playing styles, and competitive levels. The collective consensus from players on this topic was there was a need for more match play and consistency of matches, competition and exposure for South African junior players. As one player reflected on his junior to college transition, the exposure to top players and competition was seen as a catalyst for building "confidence" in his game. The more he played at a higher level, the more he improved (TP 9). For him, the college route was seen as a transition step – a development step – where he got exposure to the "best players" in the world and this exposure had consistency – week in and week out for four years of his boyhood to manhood tennis transition (TP 9).

When probed about the topic of exposure, some participants reflected on their time playing in Europe and drew my attention to their first hand experiences of witnessing a "professional system" and the level of competition in Europe (TP 2). To quote one participant, "in Europe the guys are playing the best of the best from 14 years old" (TP 3). There appeared to be a consensus on a certain level reached from the South African players if they stayed in the country for their tennis pursuits. Moreover, there was a collective call for more ITF Futures tournaments to be hosted within South Africa. In addition, there seemed to be some confusion around the appropriate level of tennis tournaments hosted in South Africa. As one participant boldly stated, we need "more ITF Future's tournaments, NOT Challengers," as most of our South African players are

not at Challenger level yet (TP 12). If more ITF Futures tournaments, however, are hosted within South African borders, then more players would have access and opportunity to play and improve or, quite simply, get exposure to “next level” competition. Without the ingredient (step) of “next level” tennis, the chances of improvement were seen as low (TP 12). Moreover, exposure to next level tennis was seen as a prerequisite for the college pathway and / or the professional pathway (C 1, C 2, C 3 and TP 12).

Using constant comparison and the iterative approach – going back and forth in the data – an additional sub-category was identified that expounded upon another layer within the category of transitioning steps. This sub-category known as, playing for a team: Doubles format, revealed the importance of developing a well-rounded tennis player through doubles – a player with a well-developed court sense, and one who reads the play book, i.e., shot selection and thinking through building points. As one participant put it, for him, one of the reason’s he switched coaches and academies in his early career, was due to the need to build his mental side. For example, thinking like a tennis player and thinking through his game. He suggested that his previous coaching set-up focused on “hitting the ball hard (the aesthetics of the game – looking good), but it lacked the mental side” (TP 7). In doubles, a greater emphasis is placed on the transition game – moving forward from baseline to net with an attacking objective. The double’s format provides an incentive to think through building points and transitioning to the net where a large percentage of points are won in doubles. In addition, the doubles format accommodates a teammate, which, as some participants acknowledged, they experienced “less pressure in doubles and don’t feel alone” (TP 1 and TP 11). In college tennis, the doubles format is elevated to a higher status where winning the doubles point is pivotal in providing a much needed advantage over the opposing team when moving into the singles format. Overall, playing doubles was acknowledged to have many advantages in developing a well-rounded tennis player. Some saw the doubles format as a way of getting professional tennis experience, a way to earn ranking points and staying in the game longer, as professional doubles players were seen to have a longer life span than a singles player on the professional tour. In addition, it was seen as a platform for “building confidence” in players (TP 8).

In summary, South African tennis players collectively shared how they needed more next level tennis to improve their game. Moreover, they expressed that within South Africa – the current

system – does not provide structured next steps for them to improve through competitive match play. Moreover, players shared that they did not know what the next steps were. In fact, a plateau is reached in the older juniors and players are left to find competition elsewhere on the continent, across the globe and/ or opt for the USA collegiate path. Providing opportunities through the doubles format, especially in the younger age groups, could also translate into further development and help players in their transitioning steps within tennis. As noted, tennis can be a lonely and pressure ridden sport. These pressures are experienced throughout development and compounded at the highest level of the game, however, in the younger ages, players are still formulating their identities and equate their value with their performances and winning. Fostering a supportive team environment through the doubles format was shown to alleviate pressures, increase enjoyment, pushed players to perform better, and provided an incentive to win – having something (team) to play and win for.

3. Playing inside the lines (small world)

Switching into a new pair of tennis shoes, we move to category three, labelled, playing inside the lines (small world). South Africa, as the participants suggested, is not the hub of the tennis-playing world. In other words, the world's up-and-coming tennis players are not flooding the academy courts or tournament courts of the country. No, in fact, South African players are the ones having to leave its borders in search of international exposure and competition. As one participant pointed out, South Africa is “so far away” from the rest of the tennis-playing world (TP 14). When probed on this topic, a coach shared a similar view and stated, “Our kids are struggling to develop without exposure. We are so far away” (C 7). Due to the limited number of international tournaments – ITF events – hosted in South Africa annually, players are “feeling forced”, as one participant asserted, to “travel overseas” and try and “build” their tennis game (TP 18). Several participants brought up the European circuit where having access to playing multiple ITF's within a year was paramount for tennis improvement, development and transition within the game. The week in and week out competition – played in Europe – was seen as a necessary ingredient, not a luxury or nice to have, for improving, for building confidence and “testing” oneself against the best players in the world (TP 22). As one participant stated, South African “kids can't judge where they are (tennis wise) if they don't travel and test themselves” against overseas players – a measuring stick of sorts (TP 22). When asked about exposure, a coach pointed out that “our players don't know the tennis world out there – it is a bit blurred coming from SA” (C 5). Without this reference point,

one's tennis world remains small. Moreover, as one participant shared, “you think you're good, but you might only be good in South Africa” (TP 1). Another participant, as he reflected on the South African tennis world, stated, “Don't be complacent if you think you're good in South Africa. Just wait until you get overseas” (TP 17).

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that players had “a dream when they're a kid” and then they grew up, “get exposure and realise that these guys (overseas) are playing at another level”; a different level from what South African tennis players are used to (TP 3, TP 19 and TP 22). The international tennis experience – “next level” tennis – was an “eye opening” experience, and sometimes shocked many South African players (TP 1, TP 2, TP 9 and TP10). In sum, exposure to the international tennis circuit provided much needed perspective for South African players as they figured out their next steps in tennis. As one participant reminded me that when players are starting out in the game, “players and families are not getting exposed to tennis outside our borders” (TP15). This international exposure and competition, also appeared, at times, to bring into question their own playing ability, talent, and incentive for continuing in the game.

When reviewing category three in more depth, a recurring topic emerged from the data, which was identified as another layer or sub-category labelled, Not being sculpted in clay. This sub-category shed light on our court surfaces in South Africa – hard courts – as it related to holistic player development, and a catalyst for improvement and transitions within the game. South African tennis players train and compete on hard court. However, when they compete overseas, many times, they will need to compete on clay and or other unfamiliar surfaces. Clay court tennis, in particular, was seen as a mechanism to develop a player's game in a holistic way. However, due to a lack of access to clay court facilities within South Africa, players appeared to be hindered by clay. As one participant pointed out, “we don't have access and facilities in SA (South Africa) to other court surfaces” and our “kids are not exposed to other surface training” – this is needed to transition within tennis (TP 14). Another participant noted, “Our players struggle ...they don't do well on clay” (TP 6). He went on and suggested that “hard court tennis is one dimensional” and our players are sculpted as such. On clay, players learn to think, they learn how to “construct a point” and they learn to “grind” and be patient as the rallies are long; they also need to be mentally tough (TP 2, TP 6 and TP 9). The “overseas kids” or “European” kids were seen to have the “clay court advantage” when compared to South African tennis players (TP 15). Another

participant, a tennis administrator, suggested that our players needed more exposure to different playing styles (TA 2). A coach asserted that our junior players needed more tournament play and competition to help them advance (C 2).

When discussing the nature of clay court tennis – the science and art – participants pointed out how the surface presented them with learning opportunities. Players needed to get into a mind-set, both tactically and technically, to compete and perform on clay. Moreover, due to the number of potential rallies, game plans (building points), and of course balance and positioning requirements, coupled with physical demands, players lacked experience on this surface. Not performing well in the bigger, ITF international events played on clay, directly affected confidence and brought into question their playing ability and continuation in the game. Moreover, players commented on their opponents, the clay court specialists in Europe, and compared their system as a whole – their training, their professionalism, accessibility to ITF tournaments and their confidence on clay – to our South African players and system. Clay was seen as a stepping-stone to South African tennis player development, but it also was a hindrance, a setback, due to the lack of clay court experience, resources and infrastructure.

In sum, in order to improve and transition within tennis – to be the best in world – our players needed and wanted to compete with the best in the world. In fact, it was clear, that many players expressed frustration at the lack of opportunities within South Africa available to them. Players are not exposed to international competition or enough of it consistently within a calendar year. Due to the deficit of international competition within South Africa – Futures not Challenger events – South African players do not know where they are in comparison to the world's best players and consequently do not know what it takes, or what it will take to transition to the next step in their game. Not having a reference point or exposure to the world's best, is a blind spot for the development and decision making of our players' futures in tennis. Lastly, clay court tennis was seen as a development tool, a tool used to mould and shape players holistically. Players expressed the need to be stronger mentally, and to learn and appreciate the development process. Clay court tennis, for many, helped teach them patience and endurance, and increased their awareness of building and constructing points – how to play the game at the highest level against the best in the world and learn, tactically and technically, how to beat them.

4. SA coaching world

We exchange shoes, and put on yet another pair and move onto the next category. This time taking a closer look at the South African coaching landscape as presented and co-constructed from the participants first hand experiences with coaches. Category four, known as the SA coaching world, presented an interesting perspective on the tennis player journey relating to both the positives and the negatives in their player-coach relationship(s). For some players, the most influential moments in their tennis story can be traced back to their earliest memories with their tennis coaches. One participant recalled his most memorable tennis memory on a weekday afternoon – a group lesson with other kids and a good coach. He stated, “Tennis was the thing to do and every youngster (in the area) ended up on a tennis court on a Tuesday, Thursday and Friday – you know the standard thing, were sweets in a can on a Friday”. That is how, he continued, “it all started, with a good coach for youngsters” (TP 4). These experiences with fun, “good coaches”, along with the group dynamic, seemed to be early, positive catalysts for players’ early motivation to play tennis. Another player remembered being introduced to the sport through “meeting some tennis coaches” when he was younger (TP 16). He credited his entry into tennis to them, as his family were not tennis players. These early experiences with affirming coaches motivated him to continue playing tennis more competitively (TP 16).

Over time, and with age, however, there appeared to be a pattern among many participants of “tennis becoming more serious” and moving into “private lessons” where training and “putting more hours” into tennis was the thing to do if you were serious about tennis (TP 3, TP 4 and TP 7). The desire to want to play more and train more, sometimes led to decisions around the best coaching structure for this pursuit. For some players, their “high school tennis” set-up with a good coach and “depth of players” in their team was the best environment for them and their improvement (TP 3 and TP 22). As one participant from the high school set-up recalled, having an “amazing coach” and strong team and support system in high school was important for his tennis journey – “we would travel together and train together” (TP 3). He went on and recalled how his teammates pushed each other to do well in high school. For him, this was a fond memory and was seen as an important element for his motivation in the game. Having this support system and “healthy tennis rivalry” within his high school team was seen as important ingredients in his personal development as a player and person (TP 3).

For some players, the academy set-up, where they trained with tennis coaches, both off and on the court, was important for their development. One player credited his academy coaching set-up as pivotal in his overall development as a player. The coaching team, as he recalled, were responsible for planning and scheduling the year – training matches, tours, etc. From his experiences, academy life was professional and strategic. His performances would be critiqued and “feedback from coaches” would be provided to assist with specific areas of improvement (TP 20). Another participant also experienced an academy set-up as a junior, but did not have a positive experience. Reflecting on his academy experiences, this participant noted its professionalism. For him, the “strictness” and “professionalism” took the enjoyment of the game away. He noted that looking back at his time in the academy, the focus was to “make the kids professional” and “hitting the ball hard, the aesthetics of the game and looking good” was the focus, but as he pointed out, “I needed the mental side – they lacked the mental side”. They had good “trainers but lacked good coaches” (TP 7). Realising his individual needs as a person and player, he switched coaches and found one that “focused on developing your game” and the “mental side” (TP 7).

Another side of the SA coaching world that some players noted was coach collaboration or lack thereof. Some coaches, as one player shared, “were not working together” to develop players (TP 2). The consensus that SA coaches were not collaborating was seen as a negative, or hindrance in player development. Players seemed concerned that some coaches cared more about their own set-up than the development of their players. Moreover, there was confusion on why coaches from different academies in the area, or province, could not organize match play for their players. A resounding question from some players was, who do you play when you are the top player in your academy? One participant felt it was imperative that coaches work together and provide competitive opportunities for their players. This sentiment was made clear in his statement that coaches “need to organize matches for their players and, they (coaches) need to collaborate” (TP 1). A tennis coach shared a similar view on this topic and stated, “academies need to provide competition for their players against other academies – academy sparring” (C 4). Players sounded desperate for more local, competitive play, over and above international competition and exposure. Their coaches, in their eyes, were responsible for arranging these sparring match play opportunities for them. During the discussions on their coaching experiences, they would draw my attention back to the European set-up that many had been exposed to. Some participants

remarked at how professional this system was in comparison to the SA (South African) system. Players pointed out how unprofessional the SA system was, by saying that “parents out here are fighting and coaches are trying to poach players for their own academies – you do not see that in Europe” (TP 2 and TP 15). “Our coaches are not working together”, another player remarked, “our coaches need to work together and provide opportunities for players to develop” (TP 6).

Another interesting topic that players discussed about their tennis coaches, was learning about the collegiate pathway from them. Some players pointed out that they first “learned about the USA college path from their coach” – their coach, being a former collegiate tennis player himself would retell his own collegiate stories and these stories sounded cool (TP 18). Upon reflection, some players remarked on how they “originally wanted to play pro tennis”, but learned about the college pathway and “scholarships” from their SA (South African) coaches and started pursuing this college path and taking college tennis more seriously (goal wise) as a teen (TP 18). When probed about the college option, some players asserted that our coaches “don’t know the steps to pro tennis”, because “they are not current on tour” (TP 2 and TP 3).

Another discussion point, which raised concern among players were injuries incurred while playing tennis. Some players indicated that they battled or struggled with injuries throughout their junior careers (TP 15). Others credited changes to their technical game – following the advice of their coaches – led to their susceptibility to injuries and eventual injuries. Some injuries side-lined players. One participant in particular, felt strongly that his injury susceptibility was directly related to his coaches not knowing the requirements or prerequisites in preparing the tennis player’s body for the high performance and or competitive junior tennis player environment – training and competing (TP 15). He went on and suggested that coaches needed to consult a team of experts, such as sport science specialists and or final phase rehabilitation experts, i.e., biokineticists for the holistic development of their players. Parents were also seen as a needed voice in this area – a guide, a mediator – to bring attention to the well-being of their children in tennis and reducing injuries.

In sum, the collective player voice (stance), suggested that the South African coaching environment is complex and has both positive and negative sides. The resounding take home message was a need to collaboratively and unselfishly work together to help develop South

African tennis players. Providing match play and competition between academies, groups and / or squads was seen as a step in the right direction. Coaches were called to a higher, professional standard as they were seen to have an ethical responsibility to prioritize player well-being and long-term development over their coaching business model.

5. Life orbiting tennis

Moving along and changing shoes again, we unpack the next category. Category five, known as life orbiting tennis, revealed the human side of being a regular boy and growing up within the school and tennis environments. Players shared how their lives revolved around tennis in everyday life. In their case, the school day. Each day would need to be scheduled or planned in such a way that tennis was somehow accommodated. Often times, days started earlier and ended later – earlier to fit in a practice before school and then later to hit the practice courts after school. Lift clubs or carpools also needed to be arranged within the family to accommodate the various schedules in a day. Once home, homework still needed to be done, and of course, rest and sleep, before the cycle started again the next day. When probed about a typical school day, one participant suggested that “juggling school with tennis” was tough and was analogous with, as he stated, “Almost like a job” (TP 20). Another participant recalled having to “balance school and several sports until Grade 10”. In his school, “team sport was big” and were favoured over the individual sports like tennis (TP 8). Another participant noted that in his school, rugby was the main sport and focus. Rugby in an all boy school, as he asserted, is something you do and if you “don’t play rugby, you almost lose your sense of belonging” (TP 14). Moreover, not only was there an expectation from the school – schoolboy culture – there was an expectation from the family to follow in dad’s footsteps and play rugby (TP 14). Other players pointed out that all the “juggling” and balancing acts also included the travel that needed to be done in the calendar year, which naturally, would collide and disrupt the academic year of the players while in school (TP 9, TP 19 and TP 20).

This was especially challenging for players who did not opt to do home schooling in their junior careers. For most players, continuing with regular school was important to them. However, the decision to remain in regular school was noted as a challenge when trying to train and compete as a junior tennis player. Keeping up with their studies at school was difficult, as their tennis pursuits took them around the world to compete – international competition and earning ITF points were important prerequisites to improve and transition within the sport. Missing large amounts of

school and having to make it up was tough for some players (TP 1, TP 8 and TP 9). For some families, the intensity of these tennis requirements were contentious issues and some parents were shown to be unsupportive of their child's junior tennis pursuits at a specific level. For these parents and families, academics were seen as a priority and tennis was seen as something to be pursued afterwards. One participant recalled conversations with his family during his junior career in high school, as he was "missing large chunks of school" to travel and compete. He remembered "battling his parents to play more tennis" but their views on tennis and school priorities were different from his – this was seen as a challenging part of his junior tennis career (TP 12). Another participant, a parent, when probed on a junior tennis schedule, remarked on the challenges of having to travel from their small town to play tournaments. Missing school on Fridays was the norm (P 1). A coach pointed out the number of sacrifices a junior player needed to make in order to compete and improve (C 4).

Moving (migrating) for tennis or driving the tennis dream was also a talking point for some participants. Participants, who originated from small towns in the Western Cape, chose to leave home and family for their tennis dreams. Participants shared how tennis drove their decision-making as they were invested in the sport and wanted more tennis – to play, train and compete more. Considering this, there was a tennis migration of sorts – a movement of players wanting and needing to be where the tennis was. Noting that tennis was not BIG in their hometowns, their families came together to discuss their options and next steps. For these players, their tennis pursuits were supported and encouraged by their families – the motivation to have access to adequate training and competition to improve was deemed important by players and family (TP 5 and TP 8). For these players, attending boarding school where tennis was accommodated in their schedule, and could be competitively pursued, was seen as a step or transition in the right direction.

When taking an even closer look at this category it became increasingly clear that there was another layer, which specifically highlighted the extraordinary, almost irregular or abnormal expectations placed upon the normal school going kid. This concept was placed, along with supporting focused codes, in the sub-category labelled, being a regular school boy. As one participant recalled, the juggling within the school day and tennis was intense, he "played tennis every day" and wanted to "give it a real go". This competitive pursuit went on for two years in

the middle of high school, to the point where he remembered “being burned out at 17” (TP 10). He shared that he decided to stop playing tennis for a few months, “left the academy” and “just wanted to focus on basic school stuff that regular school kids do” (TP 10). Another participant recalled having to make decisions about his tennis steps in high school, because he started to “realise the commitments and sacrifices of playing tennis” while trying to do school (TP 9). Home schooling became a viable option for him, as he had to travel and compete more in ITF tournaments overseas. Home schooling was seen to accommodate his tennis schedule and provided the flexibility needed to play tennis “6-8 hours a day” – a full time job as a teenager (TP 9). Another participant shared that he too opted for home schooling as an older junior and stated, that his home-schooling schedule helped him maintain a full tennis schedule of training and competing nationally and internationally (TP 20).

The tension between the “normal”, everyday schoolboy schedule and a junior tennis player’s expectation and / or schedule permeated the interviews. Another participant shared how being a tennis kid is different to a normal kid (TP 2). He went on and suggested that “you grow up differently”, your friends are your tennis friends and all you ever see is a tennis court”. When probed about this, he openly shared that, for him, “tennis became a job as a kid” (TP 2).

To conclude, balancing tennis life with the regular, everyday schoolboy life was challenging for all the participants and all had different ways of dealing with these challenges. It was clear, however, that tennis as a serious, competitive pursuit in juniors was, for many, all encompassing – a life revolving around their sport, tennis. For some, years in the tennis job just became too much and they moved into other things, focused on their academics or considered the collegiate pathway as older juniors.

6. College: Driving the tennis vehicle

Moving past the net and entering unfamiliar territory – for many a South African tennis player – on the other side of the tennis court, we switch shoes once again. This time we focus on category 6 known as college: driving the tennis vehicle. Throughout the interviews, a recurring discussion point was the USA collegiate pathway in comparison to the professional tennis pathway. Every player had something to share on this topic. For most players, going pro out of high school was seen as a “riskier move” for South African players (TP 10). As one participant stated, “college

tennis is a fail-safe” and you get the best of both worlds – a package deal comprising a University education paid for by a partial or full scholarship and you get to play semi-professional tennis (TP 16). Another incentive of the USA collegiate tennis pathway for South African players, was that it presented an opportunity to think about the future. One player shared how he saw the possibility to “have a bright future somewhere else” in the world – America on a scholarship (TP 16). In his journey, however, he eventually weighed up his options and “chose studies over college or pro tennis” (TP 16).

Considering the future, as older juniors started to do, one participant shared how “he wasn’t sure of life after tennis”, but tennis was the goal and college tennis was the way to get to America (TP 10). Another participant recalled how he and his junior peer group discussed the tennis paths as kids. As juniors discussing their options, it was noted that there were only two paths or tennis options, professional or USA College (TP 11). This player continued and shared how his choice between the two paths was made clear as an early teen (TP 11). For him, a decision was made at 13 years old, that “college tennis was the thing to do” – his mind was made up. In order to get there, he realised the need to play more competitive, ITF tournaments and improve his marks in high school (TP 11). Moreover, the desire for college tennis was fuelled by his South African coach, a former collegiate player. He recalled his coach sharing his college experiences with him. Learning from his coach and hearing the college stories helped fortify his collegiate tennis decision – he wanted to give it a go (TP 11). Interestingly, even though his mind was set on college there was still uncertainty, however, of “not knowing what to expect” from USA college (TP 11). Once in college, he recalled how “high the level of tennis was”. Other players, when probed about the collegiate path, mentioned the team dynamic of college tennis. For some players, the team environment took some getting used to, especially growing up playing South African juniors where you are playing and competing for yourself. One participant remembered, “Having to adapt coming from SA juniors” – in college you need to think of the team. For him, this adjustment took a little while, but over time, as he stated, he “became more team oriented” (TP 18). He noted that he found support in the team and that he and his teammates pushed each other to win (TP 18).

Other players enjoyed playing for a college team as the “pressures were distributed or relieved” in a team environment (TP 11). Another participant asserted that the college route is “appealing to South African players”, because “we are far away from the sport in SA” and you have a team

in college “for support” (TP 16). College tennis, although believed to be most popular among South African juniors, was not the best fit for everyone. Some players openly shared their negative college experiences with me – conflicts and struggles. These players shared how they struggled to get on with their coaches, which resulted in “negative experiences” in college due to coach player-conflicts (TP 9 and TP 13). As one player quite openly stated, he “wasn’t really prepared for college and didn’t know what to expect” (TP 9). He had no reference point before heading to college from South Africa. He went and described his college experience as a negative one, which were compounded by coach-player conflicts – “not getting on with his coach” was challenging for him (TP 9). Another player switched colleges and transferred to another college, due to his negative experience in his first college. In his first college, the team environment was not “supportive” but in the second college team, he found “support” and had a positive experience and “thrived in the team” (TP 18).

Players shared how college tennis was an eye opening experience to next level tennis. Many expressed shock at seeing this kind of tennis, as they had not been exposed enough during their junior careers. As one participant stated, college tennis was eye opening and revealed the number of good players out there; “beyond the junior tennis world” (TP 13). For some players, to experience this next level tennis, week in and week out, was an incentive for them to pursue the USA college route. As one player reflected, college tennis was a “transitioning pathway” as professional players’ peak or break through later (TP 12). Another player, when asked about his collegiate experiences, remembered that he could “see improvement in his game” while playing college tennis. He continued, “Playing these guys”, week in and week out, helped because “I know the level now” (TP 18).

When probed about the process of learning about the college pathway, players recalled getting college offers in their junior careers. Players shared how social media messages would come in from USA college coaches wanting to “recruit them” for their teams (TP 21). One player recalled “those college offers” coming in (TP 22). “College tennis” for him “was always on his radar” and he eventually found “the best fit” for his tennis. College tennis, as he recalled, “was a great experience; the best of both worlds – tennis and a degree” (TP 22). College tennis was also seen as a four-year development step or transition step for some players – an opportunity to play some of the best players in the world and “test yourself” (TP 3). As one participant suggested, “our

players peak late and they need those extra four years to grow and develop” – their games and themselves (TP 3). Coupled with the need for more international exposure and competition, players saw the collegiate pathway as a stepping-stone and time of reflection where they could make an informed decision about their tennis future. Some players referred to their collegiate experience as a “litmus test or measuring stick” – a chance to “prove yourself and “see where you are” in comparison to other tennis players from around the world (TP 3, TP 13 and TP 22). A parent, when probed about the college route, boldly suggested that college is the only route (P 1). A tennis coach, believed college tennis to be a way to develop one’s game and develop physically (C 7).

Another participant, suggested, with a bit of a chuckle, that South Africa is a “factory for producing collegiate players” (TP 15). It was suggested that South African players, in their junior careers, are confronted with the collegiate pathway and are being encouraged to go that route by their coaches, many of whom are products of the NCAA collegiate pathway themselves (TP 2, TP 12 and TP 15).

Players vividly remembered the topic of college tennis in their junior careers and the discussions with family members, coaches and peers at local tournaments about the options. One player suggested that he never aspired to be a professional tennis player, but “he was fixated with college tennis” (TP 11). With age and over time, he started to recognise how expensive the professional route would be. He recalled being advised to go the college route by his South African coach – he remembered thinking “America”, but not really understanding the level of tennis in USA college tennis (TP 11). Another participant remarked that college tennis was the “more realistic route” for South African players (TP 8). Some players suggested that college tennis was being “pushed” in South Africa, because it represented a chance at a “better life”, future and a “package deal” (TP 2 and TP 15). As one participant boldly asserts, for him, the “professional tennis route was financially impossible”, whereas the college tennis route was doable (TP 17). Another player learned about college from his coach and decided to pursue the college route from the age of 15 or 16 years old. He informed me that he was set on this route as an older junior player in South Africa (TP 18). For him, college tennis was a good “measuring stick” for testing yourself against the competition – a way to see if you wanted to go pro (TP 18).

In sum, South African players knew of two tennis paths in their junior careers, college or professional. The college path was seen as the more realistic path and the package deal offering a degree and the chance to play semi-professional tennis in America. The professional path or pro path was seen as the riskier route, both financially and as a career, especially straight out of juniors. Players collectively expressed the need in their careers to be where the tennis was. For many players, college was where the tennis was, and quite simply, they wanted to be where the tennis was and get a degree in the process.

7. Manhood eclipsing childhood

Sporting a new pair of shoes and edging ever closer to manhood, many South African junior tennis players, especially the older juniors, realised that they wanted to do other things – things other than tennis as a career. We unpack this in more detail and focus on category 7, manhood eclipsing childhood.

Growing up and “wanting to do other things” were recurring topics relating to the transition into middle and late high school (TP 3 and TP 7). Switching focus to other things at a particular age was in some cases, coupled with the realisation that tennis for the older juniors reached a “plateau in South Africa” (TP 18). Some players shared how “they didn’t know the next steps” within tennis and a few wanted to “enjoy their last few years in high school”, having fun with their friends and continue playing school (team) sports (TP 3 and TP 7). Phrases like reality check and realizing were also recurring talking points in the tennis journeys of participants relating to tennis as they grew up. Other participants suggested that players never wanted to go the professional path and other interests became the focus (P 1 and TA 1).

There appeared to be this recurring idea of a childhood dream stemming from playing tennis and enjoying it as a kid. This dream was fuelled by watching their tennis heroes on television (TP 1 and TP 7). The tennis on TV played on a flood lit court surrounded by thousands of cheering fans in the stands seemed like a great dream and career to have – making money from playing your favourite sport was a great idea. As time progressed, players started to realise the amount of sacrifices they would need to make and the specific benchmarks needed to be reached in order to transition from junior tour to professional tour. As one participant eloquently suggested, South African players “grow up and become realistic and their dream fades away” (TP 15). Furthermore,

as the players reminded me, the proverbial tennis clock resets after a tennis player's junior career is over and they have to "start again from the bottom" (TP 2 and TP 22). As one player explained, "it's like the tennis clock resets after juniors and you start from scratch again – starting from scratch is annoying" in trying to go from the junior tour to adult tour (TP 17). This meant that all the years of investing in tennis as a junior, both physically and financially, did not count or roll over when players transitioned into the adult, ITF Futures events and tried to go pro. As one participant shared, some South African players "struggle at the bigger events and lack confidence" as the level of competition is high and players are not always used to that next level tennis (step) (TP 3). Another player shared his struggles of trying to earn points on the ITF Futures tour after his junior career, and stated that he had to "start from scratch and try and use the Futures" to try and transition from juniors to pro – juniors do not count (TP 18).

The tennis players all shared how they reached a point in their junior tennis development where tennis became serious. For many, their entry into the sport was described as fun or they experienced enjoyment from playing. Coaches and teammates or group mates had a role to play in these positive experiences. With age and over time, decisions had to be made on continuing in the sport and at what level of seriousness. Some of these decisions, in early or middle high school, involved the choice of tennis becoming the main sport or not. For some players, choosing tennis over their other school (team sports) was challenging. One participant eloquently described his "passion for rugby" at school. The decision to stick with school rugby and play both sports – tennis and rugby – was not seen as a good move from his tennis coach at the time (TP 1). The topic of tennis quickly becoming a full time job without earning capacity was also discussed with several players. It became evident that there was no such thing as a tennis welfare system to support struggling pros stuck in the Futures and Challenger levels trying to make it. When probed on this and the support structures within South African tennis, players recalled how the federation did not support them during their junior careers. As one player asserted, "SA needs to step up and support these kids" (TP 6). Another player stated, "I was never supported by the federation" and went on to compare other federations with TSA – other countries "support their players" (TP 12). A coach shared his experiences of having to seek considerable funding for his players and explained, "we've been let down by the federation and we don't have time to wait for them". He continued, "we have gone out there to raise funds for these kids and give them a real chance and real opportunity" (C 5).

Discussions on finances, the responsibilities that accompanied growing up, thinking about the future and being self-sufficient were hot topics among the players in their later teens and early adulthood transitions. As some players alluded to, if you are not breaking even in tennis, you need to get a real job (TP 13, TP 21 and TP 22). One player shared how he was aware of “needing to play on a budget” and this meant working his way “through Africa” first and building his ranking bit by bit – playing outside the continent was just too expensive (TP 13). Playing ITF’s on the African continent, was an interesting talking point. Players openly revealed the challenges and struggles they experienced when playing in the “tougher countries and conditions” (TP 2). One participant shared how he “had to stay at a venue for two back to back weeks to play these events”, because it was too expensive to break up the travel (TP 14). He went on to explain the difficulties faced when losing in the qualifying rounds of these bigger tournaments and having to sit around for a week, in a strange place, alone – no family, no coach and / or teammates – and wait for the next tournament to roll around (TP 14). He vulnerably described his experiences of “needing to survive in a foreign country for 12-13 days” while trying to compete and pick up ranking points (TP 14). Another participant reminded me of the loneliness of tour life when you needed to play these international events on a budget - you can’t afford a coach, hitting partner let alone an entourage of sport science specialists helping with nutrition, training and recovery. He further described the reality of playing in these “tough conditions” as he stated, “you’re not sleeping well and not eating right” and you are “alone” with no support at the venues because it is too expensive (TP 2).

Another player reflected on his tennis experiences from boyhood and stated he “had a dream as a kid of going pro”, but it was a “tricky thing for him”, because you see the pros on TV, but over time, you realise “you want to do other things” (TP 7). As he progressed, he, like most other players’, started to see the other tennis route, the USA college route. When probed about the college route, he suggested that “college tennis is the main route” (TP 7). For him though, he “chose to do other things”, like get back into team sports – rugby and cricket – in Grade 10. After weighing up the cost – the finances and sacrifices – he “wanted to enjoy the last few years of high school” and head to a South African university after school (TP 7). Another player shared a similar experience as he also associated tennis with a “childhood dream”, but started “getting tired of tennis”, at least the intensity of it, as he grew older (TP10). This participant, a former collegiate player turned coach, transitioned into a real job and chose a career outside of tennis (TP 10).

Knowing the benchmarks and competing in the junior grand slams were seen as valuable reference points for making informed decisions about the next steps in tennis (TP 13 and TP 22). As one participant bluntly pointed out, “our players don’t know where they are” in comparison to the rest of the tennis world. He continued to urge players to get “international exposure” and competition to know where they are in tennis (TP 22). One player suggested that “transitioning from juniors to pros is a BIG jump – you’re playing full grown men” (TP 18). A coach echoed these sentiments, suggesting that players reach a point and get a reality check about their games and futures (C 7).

The collective players voice, shared the reality of growing up as a tennis player and being faced with life decisions that affected their tennis future. As one coach boldly asked the hypothetical question of South African junior players in regards to their futures, well, “what is the plan? What do you want to be?” (C 4). For many players, tennis was a great, fun sport as a kid – the dream of Wimbledon quickly fading with time – and, for many the less risky, college pathway was seen as achievable. For others, however, tennis became more social over time – many still playing or even coaching the sport, but overall, tennis was described as being less intense in their young adult lives and even more enjoyable. Playing for fun and not chasing points became the focus with age for most players.

8. Being a pro at life not tennis

Switching shoes, and possibly, on occasion, wearing mismatched shoes, i.e., one tennis shoe and one more formal shoe, we move onto the final category, being a pro at life not tennis. In category eight, we unpack the transition out of the competitive, professional tennis pathway. This transition, as shared by the players themselves, was experienced or is being experienced by most, but not all players. The analogy of mismatched shoes might throw you as the reader into confusion, which is ironically, the intention of the hypothetical analogy of mismatched shoes. The reason for this is that many participants acknowledged their continued interest in the sport of tennis, however, over time and with age, the players acquired other interests that transitioned them into other avenues in their individual adult lives and journey’s. As one participant asserted, “I switched focus to a real job” over college tennis or a professional tennis career – but shared how he enjoyed his University tennis experiences (TP 14). For him, as he openly stated, “look I burnt out” as a junior, because his life revolved around tennis (TP 14). Switching focus to study at a local University was the right decision as he still played tennis and it was “more fun in University

– more social” (TP 14). Another participant described having to “choose a focus” as a teenager and he eventually chose academics over tennis (TP 1). For him, he was happy with this decision as he still got to play tennis and enjoy it. He pointed out how much he enjoyed it now as he could play it without the “intensity” and “pressures he experienced” as a junior – the love for the game was still there, but it was different from his junior career (TP 1).

As one participant shared, he “fell in love with tennis as a kid” and enjoyed playing and competing. With time and as he grew, he remembered that “he didn’t have the drive to go pro”, but rather wanted to pursue the collegiate pathway (TP 11). He continued by saying that for him, “college was a cool experience” as he got to travel and compete – the college competitive level was “high” (TP 11). He also shared how he started to realise “how tough and expensive the pro route was”, so for him, college was the “route to go” (TP 11). Another player shared how he used his “tennis as a way to get to college” as he realised that the “pro route was too tough” (TP 5). He explained how he had benchmarks in his career that helped him in his decision-making about his future in tennis. An example of a benchmark for him was an ITF Futures tournament where he got to see the level of tennis out there (TP 5). He openly stated, “I never had aspirations of being a pro tennis player”, but really enjoyed the collegiate tennis experience (TP 5). He summed up his transitions in the game by stating that he chose his “studies and finding the security of a real job”, but still enjoyed playing the sport at club level (TP 5).

When probed on life after juniors and life after college, some players shared how they still were not sure of their tennis futures. One player openly shared that he would still like to “give it a go and play doubles” (TP 19). For him, doubles was a strength in college and he did well in the doubles format – overall, college tennis was a “big development step” for him and pursuing pro doubles is still on his radar (TP 19). Another player shared how he is not giving up on his tennis dreams and still wants to play competitively, possibly somewhere overseas (TP 6). He continued to explain that he still has a passion for the game and “loves competing”, and sees himself competing overseas. He encouraged up and coming South African juniors to “explore overseas options as well to develop their game” (TP 6). He went on to say that if “TSA host more ITF tournaments” then he would still play and compete in those as well. He shared how he “is being pulled back into competing”, but realised that “tennis is a very expensive sport” and players need support to continue in the sport (TP 6).

The mismatched shoe analogy is appropriate when considering these differing views among players, as tennis was a huge part of their lives for years growing up. It became clear from these views that not every player wanted to transition out of the professional player – at least not yet. As one player openly described his position on his future in the game as a “hope” (TP 19). Another player shared how invested he was in tennis in his junior career and even now “he still plays competitively when tournaments come to the area, but for now, his studies are his priority” (TP 12). For other players, their tennis journeys took them into coaching. As one player shared, “I’m really enjoying the coaching side” after having an intense, competitive junior career competing around the world and “trying the college path” (TP 9). Another former collegiate player reflected on his time in coaching by saying, “I moved into coaching and put a lot of hours in and eventually it got too much and I burnt out” (TP 10). He continued, and shared that he eventually settled into a real job in sales, but still enjoyed the social aspect of tennis and played league now (TP 10).

Of all the players, only two consider themselves actively pursuing the sport at the professional level. One player is a professional tennis player. Another player is in pursuit of a professional career in tennis. In sum, South African men’s tennis players from the Western Cape had a very, competitive junior tennis career – a life full of tennis – that became serious and intense over time. The transition into late teens, presented a crossroads and / or reality check, which led to decision-making around their futures in tennis. For some, the collegiate pathway was pursued both as a development step for their tennis and as a means to better themselves and secure a real job after tennis and graduation. One player from this pathway is actively pursuing the professional player pathway. For other players from the collegiate pathway, however, tennis was used as a great networking platform to secure jobs after college. Many shared how the college community were supportive, along with their college coaches, in assisting them with their pursuits after graduation – some secured coaching jobs and settled in the USA. Other players used their competitive tennis experiences to move into South African universities, pursue their degrees of choice and do some coaching on the side. The players’ collective voice on their tennis experiences, as they saw them, were valuable in helping them navigate the next steps in their adult lives. For many, tennis was seen as a great way to meet new people, a great way to network and build a better life for themselves – some talking business on the tennis court with league or social players. This better life that was described did not necessarily entail a career in tennis, as some were tipped to pursue during their junior careers. Some players, openly and vulnerably, revealed that they never had

desires or aspirations of going pro, but saw their tennis skill set as a way to better themselves and become pros at life.

3.2 Abduction: Testing emerging theory against data

As mentioned in chapter two, I interviewed 34 participants, i.e., tennis players, coaches, parents, and administrators who were familiar with the topic of interest. These participants were selected (and interviewed) in no particular order using theoretical sampling. However, the theory generation focused on the 22 tennis players who had lived experience of the central phenomenon. Later, I returned to the data using the process of abduction to flesh out the emerging theory and gain depth of understanding. The fleshing out process along with trying / testing out theoretical explanations with data resulted in theoretical saturation with the result being the theoretical explanation (Babchuk, 2019; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Table 3.2 represents the findings, i.e., the eight categories and four sub-categories that were tested against data. This is referred to as grounded theory abduction, which is used to test the emerging theoretical explanation against the data (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014).

Table 3.2. Abduction: Returning to the data to test emerging theory

ABDUCTION = stepping back into the data and fleshing out the emerging theory & testing it against data [what are the role players saying?]

Eight Categories	Parents (P) (n = 3)	Coaches (C) (n = 7)	Administrators (A) (n = 2)
Pursuing a rich man's sport	Parents really got to be rich". P 1 Tennis is expensive (coaching and club membership). P 2 "Boils down to finances". P 3	"Expenses on tour is a BIG expense" C 1 Finances. C 2 Needing support from federation. C 3 Money plays a big part". C 4 Tennis is very expensive (accommodation overseas & being ripped off). C 5 Traveling is expensive for tennis + high level coaching is expensive. C 7	Finding opportunities to play becomes expensive / needing to travel. TA 1 Supporting players TA 2
Transitioning Steps	Needing tournaments & competition. P 1 Advocating for junior league in SA (providing competition and next steps). P 2 Needing tournaments. P 3	Chances of making it is very thin. C 1 Needing to play tournaments. C 2 Needing benchmarks to make decision. C 3 Needing to play Futures. C 4 Not understanding beyond local tennis and not knowing the pathway/ needing more Futures /knowing benchmarks (top 100). C 5 Not knowing the steps for pro tennis. C 6 Playing older players and getting competition. SA needing tournaments. C 7	Needing junior tournaments in SA/ needing to test yourself. TA 1 Getting exposure to many playing styles. TA 2

Playing inside the lines [small world]	<p>Needing competition / needing to go overseas. P 1</p> <p>Needing competition (national circuit)/ "needing access to tournaments to improve". P 2</p> <p>Needing to travel (ITF's). P 3</p>	<p>Pro tennis ="eye opening experience". C 1</p> <p>Needing to travel and needing points. C 2</p> <p>Needing match play and needing exposure. C 3</p> <p>Not knowing the tennis world out there - "being a bit blurred from SA". C 5</p> <p>SA kids needing exposure/ struggling to develop without exposure. "We're so far away". C 7</p>	<p>SA players needing play opportunities: "playing against to players in the world". TA 1</p> <p>Not much of a pathway in SA juniors. TA 2</p>
SA Coaching World	<p>Not enough tournaments in SA. P 1</p> <p>"Inadequate" system and needing specialized coaching in SA. P 2</p> <p>Coaches have to pay the bills - some focused on results. P 3</p>	<p>Coaching is "more than hitting a ball". C 1</p> <p>Overtraining from coaches. C 2</p> <p>Needing quality of coaching/focusing on college scholarships. C 3</p> <p>Academies needing to provide competition for players against other academies (academy sparring). C 4</p> <p>Coaches needing to plan the development process. C 5</p> <p>Needing stability and consistency in coaching relationship. Not jumping from one coach to the next. Believing in college route (SA coach). C 6</p> <p>"Coaching system is a 'little fragmented". C 7</p>	<p>Being shocked at overseas level of tennis. TA 2</p>
Life orbiting tennis	<p>Missing school - driving from small town for tournaments. P 1</p> <p>Playing tennis for whole junior life. P 2</p> <p>"He (my son) breathes it (tennis). P 3</p>	<p>Home schooling to accommodate tennis. C 1</p> <p>Sacrificing for tennis. C 4</p> <p>Playing a ton of tennis and becoming burnt out. C 6</p> <p>Kids burning out when only focusing on tennis. Missing school for tennis. C 7</p>	<p>Not specializing in tennis too young/ traveling week in and week out & becoming injured/ struggling with injuries / dropping everything to focus on tennis. TA 1</p>

College: Driving the tennis vehicle	<p>Your only option is college tennis". P 1</p> <p>College is likely route and "sometimes a means to an end". P 2</p> <p>"That's where most people are headed". P 3</p>	<p>That's like the next step". C 1</p> <p>Developing step. C 2</p> <p>Getting an education and "stepping stone". C 4</p> <p>Knowing the benchmarks - outside of benchmarks, heading to college/ maturing step. C 5</p> <p>Testing your game in college and education/ needing to develop + not being ready physically for tour. C 6</p> <p>Developing your game and developing physically. College as a measuring stick "a good indication". A "great stepping stone". C 7</p>	<p>Great opportunity / playing opportunity (support system). TA 1</p> <p>"Improving as a player and as a person". TA 2</p>
Manhood eclipsing childhood	<p>Some kids not wanting pro route: my son "he never wanted to". P 1:</p> <p>Not wanting to be pro tennis player. P 2</p>	<p>Some players not wanting to go pro. C 1</p> <p>"What's the plan? What do you want to be?" C 4</p> <p>Clock resetting after juniors/ needing to make decision. C 5</p> <p>Wanting to get degree / reality check. C 7</p>	<p>Other things starting to gain interest other than tennis (growing up). TA 1</p> <p>Setting realistic goals. TA 2</p>
Being a Pro at Life not Tennis	<p>Having a reality check/ choosing tennis for fun. P 1</p> <p>Reality check - I can become something else, i.e., "a banker". P 2</p>	<p>Needing a real job/ tennis not making money. C 1</p> <p>Realizing not wanting a pro career. C 7</p>	<p>Players not going all the way to pros. TA 1</p> <p>Moving into coaching. TA 2</p>
Four Sub-categories	Parents (P) (n = 3)	Coaches (C) (n = 7)	Administrators (A) (n = 2)
Being a regular school boy	<p>Missing school for tennis. P 1</p> <p>Child doing home school and enjoying school subjects. P 2</p> <p>Experiencing pressure in tennis as a kid. P 3</p>	<p>Home schooling vs regular school kid: "Almost have to be abnormal to make it". C 1</p> <p>Taking time off school". C 2</p> <p>Kids needing balance / normal life. C 4</p> <p>Kids playing multiple sports. C 5</p> <p>Being balanced & playing multiple sports. C 6</p>	<p>Playing as many sports as possible. Having fun / kids needing to perform (pressures at young age). TA 1</p>

Running a small business: Pro Tennis	<p>"Money is a HUGE issue". P 1</p> <p>Tennis is expensive. P 2</p> <p>Financials / needing to manage tennis (Academy takes care of it). P 3</p>	<p>Kids playing other sports in school. Missing out on school for tennis travel. Doing home schooling. Having something outside tennis. C 7</p> <p>A commodity, needing to manage player/ needing a return on investment. C 1</p> <p>Pro tennis is making money off tennis. C 5</p> <p>Needing finances to go pro. C 6</p> <p>Traveling around the world to play tournaments, "wasn't financially feasible". "Struggling to break even"/ Needing a sponsor. C 7</p>	Support. TA 2
Not being sculpted in clay		Overseas tournaments played on clay. Clay is tactically and physically different. C 5	We're not bred to be clay court players"/ international events played on clay. TA 2
Playing for a team: Doubles format		<p>"Team environment is stepping stone in getting confident" C 1</p> <p>Doubles making a difference. C 2</p> <p>Using doubles to work on game. C 3</p> <p>Tennis is a very lonely sport, it's not like cricket, rugby or soccer". C 5</p> <p>Needing to play other formats = developing a well-rounded game through doubles & mixed/ doubles point is HUGE in college tennis = contributing to the team. C 6</p>	<p>Doubles format to go hand in hand with singles at younger ages. TA 1</p> <p>Regretting not focused on doubles sooner - could play on tour longer in doubles/ playing for a team (Davis cup). College tennis = excelling in a team environment / having fun with doubles. TA 2</p>

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

In Grounded Theory (GT), the goal or pursuit of one's research endeavour is not to begin with a theoretical model or framework, but to generate one grounded in the data (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Since little is known about the development and transitional processes of South African men's tennis players apart from Tennis South Africa's (TSA, 2014) recommendations on development as presented in their Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) manual, the theoretical model presented in the previous chapter addresses specific gaps in the literature. Although the current gaps are extensive and will require further research, this study presents explanations that are timely and unique to the South African tennis player landscape, i.e., specifically addressing the process of development and transitions of junior to senior players.

In this chapter, the findings and each of the major categories and sub-categories that emerged are discussed and compared to the available literature base. Moreover, where the findings present a unique contribution it will also be discussed. Staying with the recurring tennis story throughout this study, we take racquet in hand and do a little collaborative rally drill between the categories, comparing and contrasting them with relevant topics in the existing youth sport and tennis literature.

4.1. Rallying with the literature: A collaborative drill between category and topic

4.1.1. Pursuing a rich man's sport and literature on tennis expenses

Listening to the players' collective voices as they reflected on their junior tennis careers, a recurring discussion point was how expensive the sport was for them and their families. When comparing this category to the broader literature base it is evident that this finding, in some ways, is not unique to the South African tennis player experience. Tennis is an expensive sport globally (de Bosscher et al., 2003; Harwood & Knight, 2009; Martin, 2015). Moreover, transitioning to the subsequent tennis levels and maintaining a successful tennis career requires considerable financial support.

According to Martin's (2015) review of the literature, financing the junior tennis player career can be a stressful endeavour for families. It is suggested that parents struggle to cover the monthly training fees over and above the other expenses incurred on the junior tour. Harwood and Knight's (2009) study on the experiences and stressors experienced by British tennis parents, note a broad spectrum of supportive roles that parents play in their children's tennis careers. Not only are parents the caregivers and providers, they are also heavily invested in the emotional experiences of their

children's sport journeys. The individual nature of tennis was shown to absorb considerable time and financial investment for tennis parents. The demonstration of this investment is noted in parent's involvement court side – keeping a watchful eye on training sessions and match play over and above transporting their children to tournaments far and wide. This investment takes its toll on tennis parents and the family dynamic (Harwood & Knight, 2009). Finances were identified as a stressor for tennis parents. Some of the major themes underpinning this stressor were, coaching fees, transport to training and tournaments, tennis gear (equipment and clothing), accommodation fees and membership fees to club(s) and the tennis governing body. The financial cost on British tennis parents is substantial when each item of the junior tennis budget is accounted for (Harwood & Knight, 2009).

In another study on junior player development, specific adult influences were shown to play a role in the development of tennis players. One of the six categories identified for adult influences pertains specifically to support, namely “tangible support”, by way of finances and transportation through tennis parents (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005, p. 116). Players in the Wolfenden and Holt (2005) study, were keenly aware that their parents were investing large sums of money to fund their playing careers. Similarly, South African tennis players acknowledged annual investments dedicated to their tennis pursuit. These players, therefore, expressed some concern at continuing on the professional path – some considering and choosing the USA collegiate path as a viable option to both fund their studies and tennis for four years.

Tennis expenses increased when South African tennis players sought out international competition on the ITF Junior and Futures circuit. Traveling expenses were highlighted as substantial, especially considering the distance needed to travel to compete in events beyond South African borders. Some players reflected on the struggle to survive on their own whilst playing back-to-back tournaments in foreign locations. Moreover, the players struggled to make a profit or break even on tour. Tournament prize money was not enough to cover all the expenses incurred on tour. The literature confirmed the enormous expenses incurred by tennis players on the professional tennis tour (Martin, 2015; Russell, 2010). Annual expenses for a top 100 ranked tennis player on the professional tour totalled \$183 000. Moreover, the cost of a coach and their travel expense for the tour was the most expensive item in the players' annual budget, \$90 000 (Martin, 2015). Considering this financial investment in South African Rand, this would be the equivalent of R2.70m and R 1.33m, respectively, as of 22 September 2021 (www.xe.com).

Although many similarities can be drawn from the literature on tennis expenses, the findings in this study provide unique insight into the gravitas of the financial commitment for South African players and their families. For example, players from South Africa, a developing country, were expected to travel extensively for international competition, due to limited access to international events within the country. This need, not want, resulted in additional financial investment and expenses. Moreover, financial support from the South African tennis federation, Tennis South Africa (TSA), was not consistent and / or non-existent for most players. Some players never received support from TSA throughout their entire junior tennis careers. Tennis parents/families were left to cover all their expenses, even when players were selected for national team competitions. Some players opted out of these crucial international opportunities due to weighing up the cost for their parents and deciding not to have their parents foot the bill. This was frustrating for players who loved playing tennis and had aspirations to give tennis a real go.

When South African tennis players reach an age where they consider a life on the professional tennis tour, they weighed up the cost and the financial investment to sustain such a pursuit. A life on the professional tennis tour, as a South African tennis player starting out, would require millions of Rands being invested annually. Players saw this investment, especially during the first few years on tour, as synonymous with running a small business venture. The first few years on tour – ITF Futures and Challenger events – were seen as most crucial to their development and progression, but also the most risky, due to not having a sustainable income from their chosen tennis profession. Playing on a tight budget (without a coach and / or team) and playing on the African continent was seen as the first steps in making the transition to the professional tennis tour. However, playing on the continent, was seen as the tougher option in the transition to professional level, due to the perceived safety risks. Being alone on tour in foreign, risky environments added to the pressures of winning and trying to retain sponsors and keep the family dynamic optimal.

The literature noted that long-term success in tennis requires considerable financial support. Financial means is directly related to entry and continuation in the sport (de Bosscher et al., 2003). Considering the socioeconomic status of more affluent tennis playing countries, these suggested that there is a greater need to invest and support athletes in their sporting careers along with providing access to facilities and investing in appropriate “infrastructure” (p. 55). The financial implications for tennis players from South Africa, a developing country, was highlighted in this study. Moreover, this finding

provides a unique contribution to the tennis literature on a global scale as it shows the entrepreneurial type investment required of South African players and families. The sub-category labelled running a small business: Pro tennis, specifically highlighted the exorbitant nature of pursuing a professional tennis career as a South African player. This context is paramount when playing the sport in the global south and the financial investment needed to transition to the next level in tennis. Finances being a necessary prerequisite to improve and compete with the best players in the world.

4.1.2. Transitioning steps and literature on development steps in junior tennis

Entry-level experiences of South African tennis players followed a similar, familiar path, with players being introduced to the sport at a young age (usually under the age of 10). The tennis environment at entry level was described as fun and enjoyable. Their first tennis coaches and group lesson dynamic aided in these positive experiences. Some players shared how these initial experiences made them want to play more tennis. This intrinsic motivation and drive for more playing time led to more tennis at school, moving to an academy set-up and / or progressing to private lessons. Training load increased along with more local competition prior to their mid-teens. Around the 15 to 16 year age-group, players experienced a plateau of sorts in their tennis trajectories. Many were left wondering what the next steps in tennis were, and how these next steps coincided with their next steps in their futures – both on the court and off the court. Playing local tennis tournaments in South Africa stopped during their mid-teens when tennis players recognised the need to improve their international ranking through competing on the international tennis circuit, i.e., ITF juniors and Futures events.

This shift to international tournaments was pursued by tennis players who were considering the USA collegiate path and who were undecided about their long-term future in the sport. The USA college tennis path was seen as a development (transitioning step) onto the professional tennis tour for South African players – a time to grow as a person and as a tennis player. Players perceived themselves to be behind the rest of the tennis-playing world in their development and transition readiness. College tennis, a transition step into adulthood, presented four additional years where South African tennis players could grow into their manhood. Four years of collegiate tennis also presented South African players with time and some breathing room, to figure out if a professional tennis career was something they really wanted to pursue. Furthermore, college tennis provided players with benchmarks and / or reference points as to where they were in their tennis games in comparison to their college teammates and semi-professional opposition.

The concept of competence and / or perceiving oneself as a competent tennis player in comparison to the broader tennis-playing world was noted. Once exposed to the international tennis world through travel and competition, South African tennis players expressed shock and surprise at the level of tennis they encountered. Some noted they were overwhelmed by the experience. Considering this exposure, and the subsequent comparison of their games and their performances to their international competitors, players' perception of their competence and confidence in their ability to transition from junior to professional level was brought into question.

This finding is reflective of the literature on the developing youth athlete, in particular within the psychological domain. Gould and Nalepa's (2016) review on mental development of the youth sport athlete, noted that young athletes' perceptions of how they see and interpret their abilities and physical competence in their skill is linked to either continuation or withdrawal. Athletes who perceived themselves as competent in their skill set and activities had a greater chance of continuing in their sport with greater intensity and motivation, as opposed to athletes who deemed themselves to be less competent. Furthermore, this aspect links to the broader context of achievement motivation theories in psychology literature. For example, Competence Motivation Theory (CMT; Harter, 1978; 1981) suggests that one's curiosity and need to experience competence underpins motivation to engage/achieve in activities. Moreover, individuals will continue engagement in activities with the goal of mastery if they perceive themselves as being competent in such pursuits (Harter, 1978; 1981; Potgieter, 2016). However, lack of positive reinforcement from social agents, e.g., parents, coaches, in this process of engagement/mastery coupled with feelings of failure and "negative emotions" could result in "low competence motivation" (Potgieter, 2016, p. 36).

Another important finding was international competitive opportunities for South African tennis players. Playing more international tournaments is a pivotal step in improving one's game. This finding is similar to that of Reid et al. (2007) and their analysis of the junior boy's tennis circuit and progression onto the professional circuit. International competition was a key development step in progressing within the sport – the critical age range was 15 to 18 years old for increased match play and competitiveness.

Playing the doubles format was another important finding with respect to development and transition within South African tennis. Many players preferred the singles format, but identified the doubles

format as a platform to improve their game and potentially their ranking whilst having fun. USA college doubles also represented the importance of the team dynamic in competitive tennis. Winning the doubles point in collegiate tennis is advantageous as it gives the doubles point winner (team) a lead prior to entering the singles format. This provides an incentive for players to keep performing well and providing a will to do well and win. Playing doubles also took some pressure off the players as they had a teammate on court to help alleviate their performance anxiety and in reducing their fear of failure. Considering this aspect, the findings correspond to achievement motivation theory in psychology. For example, the achievement need theory theorises that individuals who thrive on challenges presented in the sport context, will seek out opportunities to be tested. These individuals are not dissuaded from such pursuits through fear of failure. In contrast, individuals who are not so inclined, will avoid challenging situations as their self-worth is underpinned by their achievements and performances in such tasks (Atkinson, 1974; Potgieter, 2016). The doubles format in tennis, for some players, represented a safe space for them to relax and play their games freely.

Terry et al. (1996) measured anxiety levels (pre-performance) for singles and doubles matches in the United Kingdom (UK), and reported that overall anxiety levels were lower in the doubles format compared to singles. They suggested that these differences between the two playing formats highlighted “the individual rather than the specific characteristics of the sport” (p. 602). In other words, playing an individual sport like tennis, but with a teammate/partner reduced anxiety and stress and created a less lonely, isolated playing experience. This aspect of the doubles format in tennis was confirmed in the findings on the South African players. Not only was there a sense of reduced pressure and anxiety experienced by the South African players during doubles, the format itself presented additional opportunities to play more tennis and earn ranking points. Additional match play opportunities and chances to earn ranking points were favourable stepping-stones in the developmental pathways for South African players’ transition(s) within the sport.

Considering the broad literature base on development steps for the young athlete, much has been written about athletic development models and / or frameworks (Bailey et al., 2010; Côté et al., 2005; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; 2016; Holt & Neely, 2011). Furthermore, several models have entered the youth sport discussion and spurred rigorous debate over the years, leaving sport practitioners and sport policy makers with a plethora of options to choose. Too many options, in some respects, can be counterproductive and could do more harm than good if interpreted and applied without fully

understanding the science behind them (Bailey et al., 2010; Côté & Hancock, 2016; Ford et al., 2011; Pankhurst, 2016). Pankhurst's (2016) review of the junior tennis player literature, specifically the American junior player, brings into question the effectiveness of the United States Tennis Association (USTA) development system in catering for the individual tennis player's development needs, not just the collective. Pankhurst (2016), asserted that, although a development framework was needed for junior players, adequate attention should be paid to individual differences in their growth, development and maturation. A strong reliance on chronological age and corresponding (expected) development stages/transitions, negates the uniqueness and complexity of the individual – the growing person in the sport of tennis.

The findings on South African tennis players, lead me to share a similar, critical line of reasoning with Pankhurst (2016), in bringing into question the appropriateness and effectiveness of Tennis South Africa's current Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) model (TSA, 2014). Not only do I question the rigor and reasoning through which it was adapted from a first world, Canadian model, but also its empirical effectiveness in applying it to South African junior tennis players (Bailey et al., 2010; Balyi & Hamilton, 2004; Ford et al., 2011; TSA, 2014; Vierimaa et al., 2016).

The psychological and psychosocial domains, as noted in the findings on the South African tennis player, are pivotal in understanding the development and transitional steps of South African tennis players holistically. Adopting a "whole person/whole career" position, as suggested by Stambulova et al. (2021, p. 3), on South African tennis development – augmenting the current model – would go a long way in accommodating the complexity of the developing child (physically, psychologically and psychosocially) (Gould & Nalepa, 2016; Pankhurst, 2016).

4.1.3. Playing inside the lines (small world) and literature on competitive match play and development-related exposure

South Africa, as indicated in these findings, is not the hot spot for international tennis. Due to its geographical location, the distance from the global tennis world is seen as a hindrance to transitioning in the sport, i.e., being too far away from the action. Furthermore, due to the limited number of ITF junior and Futures tennis tournaments hosted annually within South Africa, players strategically needed to plan extensive international travel within their academic schedules and parents need to budget accordingly. The international destination deemed most desirable to improve one's tennis

game was Europe. The European tennis tour and European system were coined as the benchmark and / or reference for what a thriving, professional tennis set-up should resemble, especially for the junior to senior transition. For one, European tennis federations were perceived to support their players and provide them with adequate resources, i.e., financially, in terms of infrastructure, facilities and in hosting numerous, stage/level appropriate ITF Junior and ITF Futures tournaments within its borders. For the European players, these tournaments were a mere car, bus or train ride away.

For the South African tennis player, it could mean several international flights, accompanied by more domestic travel once abroad, along with accommodation and living expenses – the South African Rand to Euro or foreign currency exchange rate adds to the budget. Furthermore, considering that South African players do not generally travel with an entourage, being within walking distance from the venue could bring peace of mind to both family members back home and the lone tennis traveller himself. However, this safety and / or convenience provision added to the overall expense of the tennis trip. Playing back-to-back international tournaments on the African continent was deemed more affordable for the South African player and their families. However, some of the locations where these tournaments were hosted were perceived as unsafe or risky. Considering this, extra costs were incurred when reserving safe accommodation close to the tennis tournament venue.

Reflecting on the literature on talent development environments and competitive exposure, it is clear that having references / benchmarks and / or exposure are useful in providing scope and context to an athlete's decision-making about their developmental paths (Williams & MacNamara, 2020). Moreover, considering the competitive tennis environment, having international competition within the junior boys' tennis circuit was seen to be favourable in producing top 20 players on the International Tennis Federation Junior Circuit (ITFJC). For example, Reid et al. (2007) focused on boys' junior tennis players who "achieved a top 20 ITFJC boys'" year-end ranking between 1992 and 2003 (p. 669). One hundred and sixteen tennis players were included and their progression onto the professional tour was tracked until the end of 2004. Of the 116 players, 106 transitioned onto the men's professional tennis tour. Countries leading the way in producing top 20 junior tennis players during this period were the USA and then France. According to Reid et al. (2007), before junior tennis players enter the professional tour, they made "full use of their time" on the junior boys' tour (p. 671). The mean age of the top 20 junior players was 18.1 years, which revealed that their time within the junior international competitive set-up was extensive before they transitioned onto the professional

circuit. This (2007) study reflected the need for more international competition for junior tennis players, which links to the findings on South African tennis players. Local tennis players need more competition and better access to international tournaments in order to develop and transition within the game. Without this key ingredient, our tennis players struggle to compete at the highest level of the game consistently.

The current findings, when compared to Williams and MacNamara's (2020) study on the deselected elite athlete, showed similar experiences of early exposure to professionalism within their sport and the positive influence thereof on their development. For example, when cricket and rugby players were interviewed regarding their prior elite involvement within the talent development pathway in their selected sport, some disclosed how their exposure to professional type environments provided insight into the demands of professional sport. Others referenced how training like the professionals and exposure to top training facilities were a source of inspiration for them. Furthermore, exposure to professional type environments in the junior career influenced athletes' behaviour in wanting to strive for professionalism within their own sporting pathway. Having these benchmarks in one's junior career, helped athletes get a sense of where they were and where they needed to go in order to transition into the adult professional sport (Williams & MacNamara, 2020).

Similarities can be drawn from the broader literature base on the junior tennis player as well as the youth athlete from other sporting codes (Reid et al., 2007; Williams & MacNamara, 2020). However, where the tennis findings add depth to the international tennis competition and exposure discussion is in the complexity of the number of stepping stones required to attain this goal, i.e., financial investment, proximity and accessibility to international competition and consistency of international competition within a calendar year. This is consistent with de Bosscher et al.'s (2003) findings on socioeconomic factors that contribute to tennis playing nations and their success in producing top ranked tennis players, i.e., wealthier nations have to invest in their athletes, provide facilities, infrastructure and resources.

Another important finding is the South African tennis players' limited exposure and accessibility to clay court tennis. The topic of court surface was discussed at length among the South African tennis players – hard courts are the dominant training and playing surface in the country. Limited exposure and experience on other court surfaces was a hindrance to South African tennis player development

and improvement. Clay court tennis, in particular, was a court surface that South African tennis players struggled on and felt incompetent on, due to limited exposure and access. Traveling and competing abroad meant that the clay court adjustment was inevitable in trying to earn points and improve their game. However, South African players' poor performances on clay affected their confidence and perceived competence.

Reid et al. (2007) suggested more clay court tennis and / or a combination of clay and hard court tennis, especially for the development of the junior tennis player. Clay court tennis and exposure to other court surfaces and competition are important ingredients in the development of tennis players, especially in their mid-teens. The provision of consistent match play and competition was deemed a critical ingredient for continued improvement and as a way to gauge where the players were in comparison to the rest of the tennis-playing world. Moreover, a desperate, collective plea from the local players suggested that there was a sense of confusion regarding the type of tournaments offered in the country. Players argued that more appropriate level (grade) tournaments be offered, such as the ITF Futures as opposed to the more advanced level, namely the ITF Challenger events. The reasoning for this was based on their perceptions about the current level of South African junior tennis players, i.e., the majority of players are not ready to perform at the ITF Challenger level.

4.1.4. SA Coaching world and literature on coaching

The local players' relationship with their coaches was pivotal and interesting with some positives and some negative findings. Several players' entry-level experiences with tennis were traced back to their positive experiences with their coaches. Tennis was an unfamiliar sport until they were introduced to the game by a coach. Over time and with age, more tennis was played and at greater intensities. This resulted in more time with coaches. For some, switching coaches and / or heading into a more structured environment, such as a tennis academy, was seen as a way to improve their games.

A tennis academy set-up offered a professional structure to training and competitive play, where players invested hours into their tennis on a weekly basis. For some, this professional approach to their tennis was helpful in moving their game forward. Moreover, the academy coaching staff tended to be very hands-on in their involvement with scheduling competitive matches and tournaments, both locally and abroad and providing support and feedback on players' performances. Long-term goal setting was also seen as helpful, especially when coaches helped players plan their schedules and to

set realistic goals. Some of the goal setting for their games was based upon their ranking and their understanding of ranking milestones in comparison to the rest of the tennis-playing world.

For certain players, the academy set-up was seen as too intense and professional, to the point of burnout. Another dynamic to the coach-athlete relationship experienced by South African players was the perceived lack of mental toughness taught and / or instilled by their coaches. Ball striking and focusing on the aesthetics of how well they looked on court was understood to be prioritized. Some players subsequently struggled with the mental side of their games and handling the pressures of the bigger matches. The coaches are not entirely responsible for development of mental preparedness, however, they are responsible for providing/simulating match-play scenarios where these attributes are required. Increasing exposure to tough, pressurised competition (in responsible amounts) is needed to help players prepare mentally and emotionally for such scenarios when it counts on tour.

The literature on competitive engineering, suggests that the sport environment be engineered to cater for the needs of the developing athlete (Burton et al., 2011). One idea for competitive engineering is to down size sport to make it more appropriate for children's participation, i.e., smaller courts, racquets, low compression balls and appropriate scoring format. Considering the concept of engineering the junior player environment, the unique contribution of this study suggests taking this a step further in contextualising the needs of the developing tennis player at various stages of competition. For example, by understanding the benchmarks in tennis transitions and development, i.e., where our tennis players are in relation to their international competitors, coaches, can employ strategies to help players prepare mentally for these levels of progression. An example would be to simulate / engineer opportunities for players to win and lose by having them compete against stronger and weaker players.

Comparing these findings to the literature on the coach-athlete relationship, along with the ongoing discussions on the mental health of the athlete in the high performance environment, a few similarities were noted (Gerdin et al., 2020; Harwood & Knight, 2009). For example, Harwood and Knight's (2009) study on British tennis parents and the stress of being a sport parent, found that some stressors for tennis parents were directly related to coaches. Surveys were distributed to 123 tennis parents and seven central themes of stressors were identified during the analysis phase. A core theme specifically related to "coach-related stressors" was identified (p. 344). For some parents, this core theme

pertained to their observations of the coach's unprofessional court etiquette and behaviour. Parents expressed frustration when observing their child's coach paying little attention to their child and / or engaging in other unrelated activities on court, i.e., cell phone usage and communicating with other people. Moreover, parents cited that their children received "poor advice" from coaches along with inadequate communication and feedback on long-term player "development plans" for their children's futures (p. 344).

Regarding the mental side and mental preparedness of the junior tennis player, Harwood and Knight (2009) highlighted another core (stressor) theme called "competition stressors" (p. 343). Parents expressed concern for their child's psychological preparedness for tennis competition in all three phases, i.e., pre-match, in-match and post-match. They noted that their children appeared under prepared mentally for matches, with some observing anxiety. Moreover, some players struggled with their on-court behaviour and emotional control. From the parents' perspective, coaches were seen as the responsible parties in helping their children in all aspects of the game, including mental preparedness and planning for their long-term development.

Another important finding was a lack of coaching collaboration among South African coaches. These local coaches did not appear to be working together to provide opportunities for their players to develop. One way of providing development opportunities for players was through competitive match play and / or sparring. Players from academies and / or high school set-ups were not presented with frequent opportunities to play against each other. Coaches were seen as the responsible individuals for making these opportunities possible, but they did not. Instead, coaches kept tight rein on their own players and set-ups, which left top players in their respective set-ups at a loss for how to improve, as they had no stronger players against whom to compete. The concern for these players were not having adequate match play and / or competition with stronger, local competitors, which could assist in preparing them for the competitive tournament environment. Lack thereof was perceived to stunt their competitive readiness and transitions in the game. Consistent competition in match play scenarios was deemed necessary for improvement. Isolated training within their own tennis academy or high school was inefficient in helping them gain a competitive edge. Being thrust into competitive, pressure-filled match play scenarios against other stronger players was important.

Similarities can be drawn between the current findings and that of a study on full-time tennis coaches in Sweden (Gerdin et al., 2020). The Athlete Talent Development Environment (ATDE) model (frequently used in Scandinavian contexts) highlights the role of athlete talent development environments and the positive or negative roles coaches play in creating these environments. An example of this inter-play was noted in this study. Focus group interviews were conducted with 13 full-time tennis coaches to understand how their daily coaching routines either “promoted or hindered athlete development in Swedish tennis clubs” (p. 13). The findings showed that due to the coaches reporting to senior management (club boards, etc.), their priorities were largely dictated to by management and, therefore, their time and attention to focus on the athlete’s development was limited. Administrative tasks were prioritized with little time left for planning and player development. This was deemed to negatively influence the ATDE. Likewise, it was noted that South African tennis coaches did not prioritize development opportunities for their players. Moreover, the overall perception from some of the interviewed players was that their coaches prioritized their tennis business model over their player development.

Another important finding related to the information the South African players acquired from their tennis coaches on their next steps in tennis. Players appeared to favour the USA collegiate pathway over the professional pathway. Their direct source of information on these transition steps were their tennis coaches. Similarities could be drawn to Pummell and Lavalley’s (2019) study that focused on the junior to senior transition among tennis players in the UK, and showed that junior players required strong support structures in order to progress in the game. One pivotal support structure in the transitioning process was informational support, i.e., senior players with experience of tour life providing insight on the necessary steps in the journey of making it to the professional level. The study focused on the design, implementation and evaluation of an intervention programme relating to the junior to senior transition for junior tennis players. The intervention consisted of five senior role models who were interviewed and video recorded on their tennis journeys from the junior tour to senior tour. These rich sources of information were then presented to a sample of junior players over a period of 11 weeks as part of the intervention phase. Feedback was then received from the junior players, which formed part of the evaluation phase. The concept of providing rich informational support to junior tennis players was recognised as a necessary step in helping junior players know what to expect from the professional tour, and who better to provide this information than former junior players who made the transition themselves (Pummell & Lavalley, 2019).

This study is in some ways reflective of the findings on the South African tennis players. For example, it was expressed by some players that South African coaches did not know what it takes to transition into professional tennis, as they had not made the transition themselves. In fact, South African tennis coaches were shown to be more familiar with the USA collegiate pathway and encouraged their players to pursue this path instead of the riskier professional path. Not knowing what it takes or not being adequately prepared for the demands of professional tennis could be deemed a hindrance to the junior tennis player and their transitions in the game. This aspect of the findings, specifically contextualised to the South African coaching landscape, adds depth and uniqueness to the subjective nuances associated with South African tennis players' development and their transitions, i.e., opting for collegiate tennis and out of the professional pathway.

Another poignant finding on the South African tennis player related to injuries and injury prevention. Reducing injuries in the junior player is an important part of long-term player development as well as safeguarding overall well-being during the transitioning process (Kovacs et al., 2007; Moreno-Pérez et al., 2021). Some South African players were concerned that their coaches were unequipped or lacked knowledge to assist with providing guidance on preventing injuries. With increased training demands and adjustments to technical aspects of their games in the teen years, some players became injured. Some injuries side-lined players causing them to miss out on competition in their final years of their junior playing careers. Others struggled with injuries throughout the course of their junior careers, which they traced back to overuse and technical changes under the guidance of their coaches. Players were concerned that their coaches did not seek out or consult sport medicine specialists with matters outside of their coaching expertise, i.e., injury prevention and recovery. Some of the injuries that were experienced by the players were deemed preventable. Tennis, in the current era, places enormous stress on the body due to its "high demanding" nature with quick movements and "changes of direction" executed at speed (Moreno-Pérez et al., 2021, p. 1216). Due to the physicality of the modern game dominated by power, strength and speed, players are required to adequately prepare, on and off court, to meet these demands (Kovacs et al., 2007). The findings on South African tennis player injury, is consistent with the literature on the junior tennis player, which suggests that monitoring workload in the junior player is an important step in reducing injuries as well as providing insight into the needs of the developing body regarding fitness and conditioning (Kovacs et al., 2007; Moreno-Pérez et al., 2021). Early specialisation in tennis is suggested to be a precursor to injury, while later specialisation reduces injury prevalence later on (Jayanthi et al., 2013). The findings also

suggested that earlier rather than later specialisation in tennis – quitting all other sports and choosing tennis – prior to the mid-teens leads to changes in transition trajectory, i.e., transitioning out of the professional player pathway. Where the current study presents unique insight, is by positioning this discussion within the appropriate junior to senior life transitions, as opposed to only tennis.

Regarding the specific sport domain, accommodating the developing athlete through diversification and sport sampling prior to specialising in a main sport (tennis) in the mid-teens, could minimize injury risk in tennis (Côté et al., 2009; Jayanthi et al., 2009; 2011; 2012; 2013; Myer et al., 2016). Moreover, consulting experts in sport science, and final phase rehabilitation experts, i.e., Biokineticists, could aid in safeguarding the developing tennis player through their transitions. Biokinetics is an established health profession in South Africa that specialises in exercise therapy and is affiliated with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). Biokinetics distinguishes itself from physiotherapy as its scope of injury rehabilitation and management is primarily focused on final phase care (Ellapen et al., 2018). Biokinetics practitioners referred to as Biokineticists, are also known for their work in promoting health and wellness as well as orthopaedic injury prevention. The field of Biokinetics, in particular, is a valuable resource for coaches and parents to utilize for players' overall health and well-being in the sport. Expanding ones' tennis programme/academy to include such consultations is deemed necessary in helping coaches guide their players through injury spells and recovery while competing at the highest level of the game.

4.1.5. Life orbiting tennis and literature on the development of the person/player

Considering the South African tennis players' development experiences, it was noted that after the fun and enjoyment phase of under 10 age group tennis, tennis became markedly different. The players had similar experiences and views on the seriousness of the sport and this developed with age and over time. Some players left other team sports at school to pursue tennis as their main sport. This presented challenges for some players as the school environments either did not accommodate tennis as a school sport or tennis was regarded as a minor sport in comparison to team sports such as rugby and cricket. Choosing tennis over rugby had challenging consequences for some players. These decisions caused tension between school sport coaches as well as family members who had a strong rugby legacy at the school – players were tipped to continue the family legacy, but chose not to. Other players tried to juggle multiple sports, including tennis, well into their teen years, but found that trying to do it all, plus carry a normal academic schedule in a school day, caused additional pressures,

stressors and fatigue – some acknowledged burnout as a real challenge in their mid-teen years due to having too much on their plates. This links to the literature on burnout. Burnout is well documented in the literature on the competitive youth sport athlete and contextualised to the junior tennis player (DiFiori et al., 2014; Gould et al., 1996a; 1996b; 1997; Walker, 2013).

The concept of normality and / or having a normal childhood in comparison to their non-tennis playing friends, was another important finding. Being a regular schoolboy was not something that South African tennis players were afforded in their junior tennis careers, especially when they reached their mid-teens. The mid-teens were viewed as pivotal milestones and / or mini-transitions within their tennis transition. Life transitions seemingly collided with their tennis transitions, and some players were forced to grapple with big decisions regarding their next steps in tennis and next steps after high school. Tennis, in childhood, seemed to enthrall and captivate players and was all consuming, but as time passed, players were confronted with the realities of the sacrifices they would need to make to pursue their tennis dream all the way to the professional level.

For some, these realities hit home sooner than for others when they were confronted with struggles in their social and sporting relationships at school. Some players longed for a little bit of normalcy in the latter part of high school. Having invested years in tennis as children and consequently missing out on friendships and other fun team sports with their friends, a few players turned their attention to their social networks and academics in the final years of high school. Some left tennis and returned to team sports. Others decided to pursue a tertiary education at a South African university, turning down USA tennis scholarships to pursue a degree here. However, the players whose tennis dream became bigger and dominant over time, shifted their focus to home schooling to accommodate the demands of the academic school calendar and curriculum. The home-schooling option accommodated intensive daily training as well as extensive travel for national and international competition.

Training, travelling and competing at the highest level as a junior tennis player required extraordinary discipline and a large time investment – like a full-time job – leaving little time for anything else outside of it. The benefits of prioritizing tennis over everything else in a developing teenage boy's life, resulted in a perceived investment into their future after high school. Some players used this investment, i.e., their tennis ranking on the ITF circuit to attract USA collegiate tennis coaches with partial or full scholarship offers. Securing a collegiate tennis scholarship was seen as an

accomplishment as well as a necessary transition step for the next phase – a chance to study further and play semi-professional tennis for four years.

When comparing these findings to the literature on the developing person in sport, it is clear that there are certain normative steps/transitions that tennis player's follow (Gould & Nalepa, 2016; TSA, 2014). Gould and Nalepa's (2016) review of the literature on the mental development of the tennis player, identified three distinct stages for the junior tennis player in the USA development system, i.e., USTA. These include the 1) "introduction/initiation phase, 2) refinement/transition phase, and 3) elite world-class performance" (p. 38). Each phase has an appropriate age-stage level and corresponding expectation through which these junior tennis players should transition. For example, the introduction phase focuses on the 6-to12 year age range where juniors are introduced to a fun-filled tennis environment and their holistic development, i.e., physical literacy is prioritized. Young players are taught fundamental movement skills and are affirmed for their efforts and progress rather than performance and winning milestones. Moreover, this initial stage focused on a wide range of sport participation to help provide a good athletic foundation before specialising in tennis.

The next phase, the refinement/transition phase, focuses on the 10 to 20 year age range. The emphasis in this phase is on training and developing competitive skills – the "learning to train and compete" phase (p. 38). Players in this phase are expected to set their goals on improving their game and developing as players, not just merely to play the sport, as in the previous phase. The elite world class phase is the next phase and begins at the age of 15. The emphasis is on progressing into the elite level of the sport through "competitive excellence" (p. 38). Elite level players focus on mastering their tennis skills to progress and perform at the highest level of the game.

Considering the USTA development system and the American junior tennis player, some similarities can be found in the South African model for tennis development, i.e., Long-term player development (LTPD) (TSA, 2014). The LTPD model comprises seven key stages: 1) Active start (males and females; 0-6 years), 2) FUNdamentals (males 6-9; females 6-8), 3) Learn to train (males 9-12; females 8-11), 4) Train to train (males 13/14-16/17; females 12/13-15/16), 5) Train to compete (males 16/17-21+; females 15/16-21+), 6) Train to win (males 20+ ; females 19+) 7), and Active start (males +/- 16 onwards; females +/- 15 onwards). South African players are expected to progress through these stages. Each stage requires more investment and commitment to tennis over time. The initial stages

of the South African model are designed and interpreted, in theory, similarly to the American model, i.e., the active start and FUNdamental stages. This stage is a flexible time of development for South African players where more emphasis is placed on holistic development rather than tennis performance outcomes (TSA, 2014).

When compared to the broader literature base on the developing athlete, South African tennis development and transition experiences are not entirely unique (Gould & Nalepa, 2016; Pankhurst, 2016; Stambulova et al., 2021; Wylleman et al., 2015). In fact, Wylleman et al.'s (2015) review on transition literature indicated that when athletic careers are conceptualized to accommodate a “whole career/whole person” view of the athlete moving through their career, provision is made for multiple transitions within the athlete's other domains that are happening concurrently as they move through their sporting journey (p. 102). These transitions are normalised within their development throughout the life-span with the “psychological and psychosocial” domains being accommodated and influencing their decisions and progression within their sport (p. 102). This understanding is helpful when considering the local tennis experience.

Moreover, when compared to literature that adopted an ecological and systematic approach to development, the athlete is recognized / viewed in the context of their environment at various levels, i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystems (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015). The contribution by scholars using an ecological systems approach to development has been tremendously helpful in understanding the nuanced and complex interplay between the athlete and their environment. This interplay is not static over time, but interactive and dynamic (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Carlson, 1988; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Henriksen, 2010). The athlete environment and the relationships nestled within the environment are considered to be important influencers for long-term athlete development.

Carlson's (1988) seminal work on tennis development utilizing an ecological approach to development on Swedish tennis players is a great example. This pioneering work suggested that an ecological systematic lens allows one to understand an array of factors influencing tennis development within the broader development environment better. Using Bronfenbrenner ecology theory as a theoretical framework for contextualizing development of tennis players, Carlson (1988), showed the socialization process of Swedish tennis players and related this normative (as per human

development) process to the interactions with their boarder environment(s). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model depicts the nested, systematic levels in a circular arrangement. The macro-level being the outer most level, the exo-level nested within this and followed by the meso-level. The micro-level is the inner most level and relates directly to the interplay / interactions of the person (tennis player) with their immediate environment, i.e., school, tennis club, family, coaching relationships, friendships (neighbourhood), etc. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Carlson, 1988). Carlson's (1988) study inevitably set out to explore the socialization of elite Swedish tennis players and how this process contributed to their success on the international stage. An important finding from the study showed that of the two groups of tennis players ($n = 10$ elite, and $n = 10$ control group), the control group started losing interest in playing after their early success trend reversed with age. Some even quit the sport altogether. The broader context from this finding is traced back to the control group's interaction / socialization throughout their development years, i.e., interactions with their environment as a whole, which differed from that of the elite group at various stages (please see Carlson's (1988) seminal work for more information).

The findings from this study have generated further investigation into the development process of athletes in other sporting domains and contributed to a wide body of literature on the systematic approach to athlete development in which the environment is a key role player in facilitating development (Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Henriksen, 2010; Henriksen et al., 2010).

Considering the literature on systematic athlete development, the South African tennis players' experienced similar transitions within their tennis journeys. However, each player had an individual and subjective experience in tennis, that collided with their environment and life transitions from childhood into adolescence. Considering this, a similarity could be drawn from the micro-level (microsystem) depicted within Bronfenbrenner's ecological model on human development and the subjective (direct) interactions happening within the South African tennis player environment, i.e., relationships with coaches and family members during the transition(s) from childhood to adolescence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Carlson 1988). Consequently, these life transitions influence decision-making around tennis continuation as well as intensity of tennis engagement along with accommodating other competing interests during their teenage years. This is consistent with the literature on competing interests as well as scheduling and time conflicts of the developing athlete (Eisenmann et al., 2020). Moreover, Scanlan's Sport Commitment Model (SCM) contextualizes

continuation/commitment in sport to the specific sport domain. This theory on sport commitment and sport continuation suggests that sport participants' motivation is embedded in their experiences of fun and enjoyment, along with their time commitments and feelings of obligation to the activity. In contrast, discontinuation is embedded in their motivation to pursue other interests (Scanlan et al., 1993).

Considering this and taking a critical view of the literature discussed above, it is evident that the South African tennis transition experience, although considered normal and somewhat expected when approached through a "whole career/whole person" lens, is still not accommodated in the South African development landscape (Wylleman et al., 2015, p. 102). The current LTPD model is reflective of this (Bailey et al., 2010; TSA, 2014). Recognising the South African development experience through a non-linear, non-isolated experience, suggests that the tennis development/transition domain is only a part of the whole experience of the junior to senior tennis transition. Furthermore, where this finding presents unique insight is in the inclusion of these tennis transitions within the context of person vs player specific decisions, i.e., tennis within the life domain.

Ironically, these findings coincide with the South African LTPD model's suggestions for the developing players' psychological and psychosocial domains, in theory. An example of this is shown in the LTPD model's supplemental information augmenting the seven key development stages, known as the "10's of training and performance" (TSA, 2014, p. 11). Psychology and schooling form part of this supplemental information. Recognising mental development and mental health of the junior player as well as their education commitments in a school day are imperative in adding context to the model. However, although well articulated in theory, the appropriate accommodation of these two important aspects within South African player development, are not applied in reality, as shown by the current findings.

Reflecting on the competitive youth sport landscape, competitive engineering literature suggests that sport for children and adolescents is markedly different than for their adult counterparts (Burton et al., 2011; Buszard et al., 2020). To accommodate the growing child in sport, several adaptations need to be made to even the playing field (Burton et al., 2011; Buszard et al., 2020; Pankhurst, 2016). When considering progressions in the sport of tennis, in particular in the junior game, we observe and learn a few interesting things. We note major adaptations to get more players into the game from the

age of five years and older. This is commonly referred to as 10 and under tennis (Pankhurst, 2016). Whilst having a developmental framework for children in theory is imperative to ensure progression/transition within sport, the practical application of such frameworks requires more rigour when considering the complexity of the growing child (Bailey et al., 2010; Gould & Nalepa, 2016; Pankhurst, 2016). The sport of tennis and the modified 10 and under framework for junior players is a great example. According to Pankhurst (2016), there is an assumption that this framework, when implemented, caters to all children within the appropriate chronological life stage. This one size fits all approach needs to be reevaluated to accommodate the individual child's development journey, especially when considering this journey in the context of growth, maturation and development of the individual, not the collective (Pankhurst, 2016).

Further context is provided on the growth, development and maturation discussion in the Myburgh et al. (2016) study on junior tennis players in the United Kingdom (UK). Male and female junior tennis players were investigated concerning skeletal age and chronological age and the subsequent influences on selection and performance in tennis. In short, it is suggested that male tennis players who are early maturers may present physical traits such as height, weight, etc. that are more advanced than their late maturing counterparts, of the same chronological age, resulting in a performance advantage. Moreover, selection bias may result in an unfair advantage in the talent identification and development process, where late maturing athletes may be "overlooked or excluded" from the development discussion (Myburgh et al., 2016, p. 1961).

Applying this insight to the LTPD model for South African tennis players, it appears that a wider spectrum of development factors in the tennis player pathway should be incorporated (Gould & Nalepa, 2016; Pankhurst, 2016; Stambulova et al., 2021; TSA, 2014; Wylleman et al., 2015). The South African tennis model is beneficial as a reference framework and as a point of departure. However, due to the interest in the literature on the developing athlete, development and growth complexities within paediatric exercise science, along with optimal development environments, the current South African LTPD model may be deemed outdated and / or one dimensional in its application (Bailey et al., 2010; Ford et al., 2011; Stambulova et al., 2021; TSA, 2014).

4.1.6. College: Driving the tennis vehicle and literature on positive youth development and tennis migration

In the beginning of their junior tennis careers and from a young age, South African tennis players showed a propensity for a vivid imagination pertaining to their tennis dreams. However, time, age and experience (exposure) gave them some clarity on a full-time tennis pursuit. A full-time professional tennis career would require extraordinary motivation, self-discipline, sacrifice, adequate training and consistent national and international competition – on par with specific international benchmarks such as junior rankings and qualifying for junior Grand slams. These ingredients, although there is no consensus on the right quantities, would need to be supported by a large financial investment (incremental and consistent over-time), accompanied by extensive travel and a coach with tour experience. Travel, would often times be lonely, risky and on a budget, somewhere on the global tennis map, i.e., wherever the next big tennis event was.

For some players, these elements came as a shock and provided a reality check of what was expected of them as they neared their late teens in order to give tennis their all. They opted out of the competitive tennis path and chose their studies over tennis, i.e., pursuing a degree at a local South African university. For them, tennis became more social and in fact was even more enjoyable compared to their mid-teen years. For others, the tennis dream was still a dominant force in their goal setting and decision-making about their futures. However, the dream changed directions from an all-consuming professional tennis path, to a semi-professional path, i.e., the USA collegiate route. Admittedly, the USA collegiate path was attractive for many South African players, with some being sold on this path from their early to mid-teen years already. The USA collegiate path was also more familiar to the South African tennis coaches compared to the professional path.

Considering this, these up and coming juniors, found a rich, collegiate tennis resource in their coaches who had travelled this path before. Tales of the collegiate circuit and scholarships, sounded intriguing to some of these junior players, especially if this came from a trusted source, i.e., their coaches. Not only were players drawn to the college path, but their families were as well. USA collegiate tennis represented a package deal and the best of both worlds to a high school graduate with his whole life ahead of him. Furthermore, this path was financially attractive to his parents who were responsible for paying the bills until he landed on his feet and became self-sufficient. Although uncertain of all the details of his future after tennis, college tennis represented four years of growth, development and

an extra step in tennis and in securing something for life after tennis, i.e., a tertiary qualification. Not only was this package deal attractive for the opportunities it presented, but it was seen as a doable and affordable option, unlike professional tennis that had no immediate returns on family or sponsors' financial investment.

Professional tennis was seen as the riskier path, especially to some players who were risk averse and who were prone to injuries throughout their junior careers. Moreover, collegiate tennis provided South African players with something to fall back on if their tennis plans did not work out, i.e., an education and a chance at a better life.

Reflecting on the findings, many similarities can be drawn from the literature, especially from the positive youth development (PYD) and sport migration discussions (Holt & Neely, 2011; Parrish et al., 2020). For example, PYD is not necessarily confined to a particular model of development, but rather a concept or lens through which developing children are viewed. Underpinned by positive psychology research, PYD recognises children and adolescents as resources for positive development. Sport is one positive mechanism for the development of young people (Holt & Neely, 2011). According to PYD researchers, children, through organized and structured sport activities, positively engage with peers, authority figures (e.g., parents, coaches, umpires) and their broader environment. Collectively this creates a platform for learning, development and civil engagement, which is transferable to domains outside of sport. PYD through sport is, therefore, a vehicle through which children transition from childhood into adulthood, and become well adjusted, contributing members of society. Sport, therefore, is not an isolated environment where its participants are transitioning through phases with the end goal of becoming a professional athlete.

On the contrary, the PYD concept is a flexible approach to development, which goes beyond the boundaries of sport. This is evident in the specific outcomes of the PYD approach through sport, known as the 5C's of PYD, developed by developmental psychologist, Richard Lerner. The 5C's of PYD are competence, confidence, character, caring/compassion and connection (Lerner et al., 2005). According to Holt and Neely (2011), each of the 5C's of this approach represents a workable outcome that can be developed through meaningful engagement in the sport environment. Competence relates to holding a positive outlook of self and "actions in domain specific areas" (p. 304). Confidence is embedded in a positive view of self and encompasses "positive self-worth and self-efficacy" (p. 304).

Character relates to an individual's view of society and their adherence to "societal and cultural rules" (p. 304). Caring and compassion relates to an individual's treatment of others, i.e., demonstrated through sympathy and empathy. Connection relates to an individual's relationship with other individuals as well as their relationships broadly, i.e., organizational interactions and connections. Lastly, once all these outcomes are developed in the person through their participation in sport, Holt and Neely (2011) suggest that another C, i.e., contribution, may develop. Contribution relates to the individual giving back to society (Holt & Neely, 2011).

Considering the PYD concept of development and using sport as the vehicle to accomplish this, there are similarities between this approach and the current findings – specifically relating to the USA collegiate path. For example, South African players recognised that the collegiate path opened doors for them and would ultimately lead to development and growth beyond tennis. PYD outcomes (the 5C's) can also be seen at other entry and exit points during South African player transitions. For example, when presented with decisions regarding a professional tennis path, players were well aware of the financial stressors placed on their parents and demonstrated sympathy for their parents' constant sacrifice. Financial implications were taken into consideration when making an informed decision about their tennis futures. For others, their financial situation(s), in a sense, made these decisions for them.

Regarding sport migration or the notion of going where the tennis is, the current findings are consistent with the literature on tennis migration (Parrish et al., 2020). People leaving their homes, families and countries for sport, i.e., migration for USA collegiate sport, links to the findings on South African tennis players leaving home to go where the tennis is. South African tennis players, due, in part, to limited exposure to consistent international competition in their junior careers, actively pursued the USA collegiate tennis path as they recognised the need to be where the tennis is. This translated into four years of collegiate, semi-professional tennis. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) established in 1906, is the "largest governing body for intercollegiate" sport in the USA (Parrish et al., 2020, p. 1812). NCAA comprises of three divisions representing the competitive levels, Division I (DI), Division II, (DII) and Division III (DIII). DI represents the prestigious, top competitive division across multiple sporting codes. Since its inception, collegiate sport has been a popular path for American athletes; the student-athlete path accommodating a dual pursuit of a tertiary education and playing collegiate sport.

Over the years, USA collegiate sport has attracted international athletes competing for top scholarship positions on collegiate teams (Parrish et al., 2020). With tennis being a popular global sport, more players from various countries are pursuing the collegiate tennis path. Parrish et al. (2020), suggested that collegiate tennis teams are quickly becoming “vehicles of globalization” as international student athletes from various nations across the globe are well represented (p. 1821). Their analysis of tennis players in the USA collegiate path revealed that collegiate tennis teams had a larger representation of international student-athletes during the 2018 season compared to their American counterparts, i.e., 59.07% international student-athletes compared to 40.93% American student-athletes.

Moreover, it was revealed that of the 30 donor nations represented on USA collegiate tennis teams, South Africa was number 15 on the list (Parrish et al., 2020). The top four nations were all European countries, i.e., Spain, England, Germany and France. Canada was fifth on the list and represented the North American region (Parrish et al., 2020). The top donor city from the sub-Saharan African region was Johannesburg, South Africa, ahead of Harare, Zimbabwe. Cape Town, the capital city of the Western Cape South Africa, did not feature on the list of donor cities for the 2018 NCAA season.

Where these findings differ from the literature and adds context to the South African tennis player’s experience is in the transition from high school to college. For example, the USTA player development pathway, incorporates collegiate tennis as just another, expected step in transitioning to professional tennis (Russell, 2010). In fact, roughly 90% of American tennis players are expected to go through college first and then make the transition into the pros (Russell, 2010). Most South African tennis players, however, after being exposed to next level tennis in college, decided not to pursue a professional tennis career. Some did not feel confident and / or competent enough to take the next step into professional tennis. The quantity and quality of international exposure in collegiate tennis, resulted in serious reflection and subsequent adjustment for some South African players. Some chose against a career in tennis – collegiate tennis was seen as an accomplishment in and of itself and was sufficient. Other players had made up their minds prior to signing a collegiate contract that professional tennis was not in their future. For them, tennis was used as a vehicle to secure a tennis scholarship and better themselves through a tertiary education. Still others, admittedly never had aspirations of going pro, despite a successful junior career and being tipped to go all the way like their countrymen, Kevin Anderson and Lloyd Harris.

4.1.7. Manhood eclipsing childhood and literature on growth, development and maturation

South African tennis players progressed from childhood through adolescence into adulthood in a normative trajectory. In other words, expected mini-life transitions coincided within tennis transitions, development and decisions around their continuation in the sport. For example, moving from primary into high school presented a number of changes and adjustments for them. During this time of growth, development and maturation, they experienced competing interests and time constraints, which was in conflict with the reality of their tennis pursuits. The childhood tennis dream was bold, bright and consumed every aspect of their lives – everything else, including schoolwork, had to fit into a tennis schedule. Over time, the tennis demands became increasingly challenging to juggle and accommodate for both the players and their nuclear familial structure. Furthermore, during the normative changes from childhood to adolescence, players travelled and competed more. This resulted in some exposure to the broader tennis world, allowing South African players to get a glimpse of the competitive pool of players outside their comfort zone. The more competitive the players became in their mid to late teenage years, the more tennis training – on court and off court – was required, along with extensive travel to national and international events.

Due to the limited number of ITF Junior and Futures events hosted in South Africa, players were compelled to travel abroad to compete and earn ranking points. International competition was prioritized by South African players trying to make it – either in the pros or college – as they valued knowing where they were and what they needed to do in order to improve their game. Moreover, an ITF ranking is the currency of tennis advancement, without it, players cannot transition to the next level in tennis. The financial costs of more training and travel were exorbitant and added to performance pressures and stressors for the players. The international stage was a shock and eye opening experience for the South African junior players. Some players felt incompetent and out of their depth competing against some of the finest players in the world. The unfamiliarity of the clay court surface and getting stuck in the Future events at qualifying level, all compounded their rationale and subsequent futuristic plans. Players reached a crossroad in their tennis pursuit, with their childhood tennis dream colliding with the reality of trying to make it to the professional tour. Players, with limited exposure to the international circuit, while moving through their expected mid to late teen life stage, were left to try to figure out their next steps. Not having enough scope and / or lived experience to do so was challenging; whilst holding onto a dream with a glimmer of hope for the future. Moreover, the proverbial clock resets when a junior player reaches the age of 18 years. Starting

from the bottom and trying to make it was a challenge for some players. For others, it was deemed impossible as the costs were too great – both financial and in other important domains, such as psychosocial. For these players, after having a one-dimensional life consumed by their tennis dream in childhood, their transition into adulthood warranted a different view and pursuit altogether. Consequently, tennis became more social as these players moved into adulthood, i.e., manhood.

During the time of uncertainty in their junior careers, the players' coaches, provided some form of solace in the retelling and re-storying of their own, adventure filled experiences on the USA collegiate pathway. Their own professional tennis tour experience, however, was perceived to be limited and uncertain due to inexperience. Some players found comfort in knowing that they could still pursue their childhood dream of playing tennis. Doing so would mean following a different path through a USA collegiate scholarship and taking on a dual-career approach, i.e., becoming a student-athlete. For some players, neither professional tennis nor collegiate tennis was appealing and, therefore, did not become the chosen path. In fact, for these players, further studies at a South African tertiary institution was the preferred route. Securing a job that paid the bills was prioritized for many players after their junior careers ended.

For the players who pursued tennis through the USA collegiate path, they too, reached a crossroads regarding their future in the sport. For some, securing a job through their tennis network was seen as a viable option after graduating college. Transitioning onto the professional tennis tour from college was still seen as too risky for most.

Reflecting on the literature and comparing it to the current findings, some similarities can be drawn from transition discussions within tennis, in particular the junior to senior transition (Pummell & Lavalley, 2019). These findings also tie in with broader discussions on long-term development along with psychosocial development (Eisenmann et al., 2020; Gould & Nalepa, 2016). A poignant example can be seen in the psychosocial development stages expected in the junior tennis player. Gould and Nalepa's (2016) review of mental development of the developing athlete, suggested that each chronological age/stage has corresponding psychosocial characteristics expected and / or normalised at each stage of development. For example, at around 6-8 years, young athletes struggle with viewing the world from the "perspectives of others". This age range shows a limited ability to "think abstractly" and beyond their own world (p. 40). This understanding from the existing literature

provides clarity on South African players understanding and / or scope of their childhood world – their childhood dream embedded within this world of concrete thinking and reliance on adults for feedback.

Moreover, when considering the complexity of the junior to senior transition in tennis, similarities can be found in the Pummell and Lavellee (2019) study, on the UK junior tennis player and the information sources that guided their decision-making about the pro tour. They shed light on the complexity and challenges presented by the transitioning from the junior to senior tour. Having adequate information from trusted sources, brought clarity to this complexity. South African players, at a certain point in their mid-late teen years were confronted with the realities of heading into the pros – a reality, most players opted out of. Pummell and Lavellee (2019) shared similar points when athletes were presented with information regarding tour life and what it meant to transition from the junior to senior tour. In fact, these UK junior tennis players showed that they were unprepared for the transition pre-intervention (prior to receiving rich information from past junior players). Moreover, upon learning more about the transition process from experienced players, these young players realized and admitted that the transition into professional tennis was “more difficult” than what some had previously anticipated (p. 161).

Considering long-term development and the competing interests and time conflicts seen in the junior players’ transitions, similarities can also be drawn from Eisenmann et al.’s (2020) review of the literature on long-term development. They noted that “overscheduling” in youth sport could affect the balance needed to maintain a healthy life for the developing athlete (p. 30). These imbalances directly influence the junior tennis player, as was noted in juggling tennis, other sports and schoolwork. Consequently, decisions around maintaining a healthy balance and future tennis plans collided. Players going through a life transition from adolescence to manhood made some important decisions regarding their futures in the game; most opted not to pursue a career in professional tennis.

4.1.8. Being a pro at life not tennis and literature on career transitions

The transition out of the professional player pathway for South African tennis players is more of an expected transition than anticipated at the beginning of the study. Furthermore, this is noted as a unique contribution from the study. During the initial exploratory phases of the study, dropout was

conceptualised to be the final transition for South African tennis players. However, the study's overall findings provide a more holistic and complex perspective on South African player development.

South African tennis players experienced a number of mini-transitions within their growth and development, which coincided with and influenced their tennis trajectory. The normative and expected process of becoming a man suggests that the all-consuming tennis dream and pursuit faded over time and with age, for most of these players. Competing interests with other sport, social networks, along with expected, traditional responsibilities that accompany the growing up process, provided context to futuristic plans, i.e., career plans. Considering this, along with realising the sacrifice of a solitary, tough tennis career on a tight budget, South African tennis players shifted their focus onto the next phase of life. Some players experienced a less stressful transition out of the professional tennis path. Others needed more time to make an informed decision and, therefore, opted for the USA collegiate tennis path, which provided an additional step from adolescence to adulthood, along with securing four more years of tennis at the semi-professional level. The decision to pursue the collegiate path was a decision and transition in itself. The four additional years of next level tennis together with becoming a student-athlete, provided the necessary information for collegiate players to make an informed decision regarding their tennis futures. For these players, collegiate tennis was a significant accomplishment in itself. Traveling halfway around the world, leaving home and family to chase their dreams and make something of themselves in the process was deemed a successful transition. For other players who never aspired to become a professional tennis player nor a collegiate player, pursuing a degree at a respected South African university was also deemed to be a successful transition. Academics became the focus in this next phase for university students, with tennis becoming an enjoyable past time and / or a semi-competitive club pursuit.

Overall, the competitive tennis landscape provided a wealth of learning and development opportunities for South African players. Gaining experience through tennis and cultivating a deeper appreciation for the skills needed to train, travel on a budget, and acquiring self-discipline uniquely contributed to user-friendly transferrable skills necessary for their adulthood transition. Considering this, the players developed a mature head on their shoulders regarding their intentionality and strategic planning for the future. Decisions around making wise choices to secure a stable, self-sufficient job entered the proverbial table talk discussions with family members and coaches, i.e., trusted sources of information during the mid to late teens.

To summarize, South African tennis players' aspirations of becoming professional tennis players were largely embedded in the formative, childhood years. However, growth and experience brought clarity on what a future in professional tennis would entail. Considering this, most players transitioned out of the professional tennis pathway, some seeking out a real job after tennis. The stepping-stones to securing a job and / or career after tennis was through an education, either at a local South African university or via the USA collegiate tennis path. Securing a real job that pays, was the outcome of a life invested in tennis instead of a career in professional tennis. Tennis was the mechanism or development step to do so, rather than the end goal.

Comparing these findings to the literature, a few similarities are found regarding the context of a life invested in sport. For example, the junior to senior transition is noted to be one of the most challenging processes in a young player's development (Pummell & Lavalley, 2019). This was found to be the case with the South African tennis players, especially when considering the developing players' limited experience and reference to the rest of the tennis-playing world. Where the current findings add another layer to the transition discussion, is in the pursuit of a better, self-sufficient life through tennis. Although this is not unique to the broader literature on career transitions, it does add value to the discussions on the junior tennis player transition. To fully understand and appreciate South African tennis player experiences and their tennis transitions, one needs to consider the context of their entire life across the lifespan, not just in youth sport or tennis.

This is evident in a career transitions model known as the Developmental Perspective on Transitions Faced by Athletes (DPTFA) (Wylleman & Lavalley, 2004), and an adapted version thereof, the Holistic Athlete Career model (Wylleman et al., 2015). These models recognise the developing person and athlete within their life transitions rather than isolating athletic transitions to the sport domain. Considering this, the current findings align more with the DPTFA model on the whole person and / or holistic approach to development and transitions, than the linear LTPD model currently in use in South Africa (TSA, 2014).

An example of this shift in perspective can be seen in my initial understanding of the tennis player landscape in South Africa. Due in part, to a one sided view based on ranking milestones of South African tennis players, I initially understood the transition from the junior tour to the senior tour as virtually non-existent based solely on junior rankings. This non-progression, based on numbers, lead

me to believe that South African tennis players were hanging up their proverbial tennis shoes and quitting the sport. This objective view of reality, in fact, only revealed part of the tennis player journey. Consequently, the term dropout is no longer accommodated in the larger narrative of this study as it undermines and negates the complexity of the South African tennis development and transition process as a whole.

Lastly, one can draw similarities and find clarity from the growing body of research on transitions presented in the field of sport psychology. Due to the expanding interest within career transition research in the sport psychology domain, the formation of a common platform to curate and disseminate this knowledge was deemed necessary in moving this research area forward. This platform known as the athlete career sport psychology discourse (ACD) was established to bring researchers together and help facilitate the continued dialogue within this research space. Finding “common ground” was prioritized (Stambulova et al., 2021, p. 2) to better understand the complexities of career transitions within the athletic world. Considering this advancement on career transitions within sport, Stambulova et al. (2021), noted some major milestones in this research area from 2000 to present day. A few of these milestones are directly related to the reframing or reimagining of the athlete, their environment, and their athletic careers within their broader life transition(s). For example, we see the use of “holistic” inclusive jargon when recognizing and discussing the athlete and their careers. In addition, there is a non-reductionist and non-linear point of reference in the placement of the athlete as a person within their environment – a dynamic interplay between the “whole person” and their “holistic” environment (Stambulova et al., 2021, p. 3). Considering these developments within sport psychology research, and reflecting on the current findings, it is evident that a more holistic view of tennis development and transitions is warranted to fully appreciate the whole story and whole career of South African tennis players – another valuable and unique contribution from this study.

4.2. Summary

The complexity of South African tennis development and transition processes are in no way a linear, reductionist and isolated journey. The representation and understanding of this unfolding process requires a more empirical rigour and subjective reasoning to account for individual experiences within the collective. In other words, these findings are consistent with a holistic or whole person approach to tennis development – placing greater emphasis on the person and their life transition(s) to fully

appreciate their tennis experiences (Stambulova et al., 2021; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Considering the wealth of insight and understanding gleaned from individual tennis player experiences, I am compelled to take a critical view of the current South African LTPD model. In other words, I deem the current model to be one-dimensional, outdated and inefficient as a stand-alone tennis development model for South African tennis players. However, if augmented with current research (recent literature and current findings) on the tennis player and the youth athlete, the LTPD model could become less linear and rigid in its approach to tennis development. This would require some adjustment in thinking and rationale when considering the purpose of a long-term player development model. In other words, Tennis South Africa (TSA) would need to grapple with the following questions when reassessing the current model: Who is the model designed for and to what end, really?

Lastly, an interesting element that was highlighted in the findings is the doubles format. This finding is in no way unique to the South African development and transition landscape. For example, Pummell and Lavallee's (2019) study on junior to senior transitions in a UK tennis academy set-up, noted that a former doubles player's transition from junior to senior tennis and into professional doubles was through the singles format of the game. This was shown to be the "typical pathway in professional doubles tennis" (p. 158). Interestingly, however, playing doubles at junior level was found to be helpful in developing one's game holistically as well as building confidence, all the while doing so with a teammate, i.e., having a doubles partner. However, the doubles format is not prioritized as a pathway or route that could translate into a viable career path for players.

The doubles format is a largely, untapped and under-represented tennis format in South African tennis. This format could spur on future discussions around holistic development along with a transition into the professional tour – doubles being the vehicle that drives it. These findings suggest that the doubles format is not prioritised in South African tennis. Moreover, there is no clear-cut path and / or platform to develop as a competitive doubles player. It would be interesting to see where this under-utilised route could take South African players in the game if utilized to its full potential.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary

Tennis as an individual sport is highly technical and places enormous stress/load on the developing body. Considering this, tennis for the junior tennis player should be contextualised and understood in an appropriate framework, i.e., the developing child in the sport. An adult sport, with adult rules and adult stakeholder expectations, etc., can easily be misunderstood in its purpose, relevance and application for the developing junior player. The consequences of not having an appropriate framework for the developing junior tennis player profoundly affects their development, transitions and future in the sport. The current LTPD framework for South African tennis development is deemed inappropriate as a stand-alone model. The model presented in this study is, therefore, proposed and should be considered and augmented in future development discussions as it is underpinned by South African player development and transition experiences.

The focus of this study was contextualised to South African men's tennis players from the Western Cape. This, in and of itself, is a unique contribution considering the dearth of literature on the youth sport athlete and theories around development trajectories, continuation and dropout from sport. Another contribution of this study is found in the research methodology and research philosophy employed, i.e., constructivist GT, contextualised to the South African tennis environment. I employed a total methodology, from process to product. Considering this, the study did not rely on an existing theory and or theoretical models to interpret, understand and explain South African tennis player development and transitions. In doing so, the theoretical model presented is grounded/rooted in the South African landscape, i.e., South African men's tennis players within a South African tennis development context.

During the initial proposal stage, the central phenomenon was identified as the process of dropout, i.e., the decision to quit the competitive pathway and not transition into professional tennis. However, during data collection in the field, the emergent and iterative qualitative research design i.e., constructivist GT, provided opportunities to follow leads and gain deeper understanding of the tennis players' worlds and developmental experiences. Immersion in the participants' worlds and the subjective meanings they assigned to their tennis experiences, accommodated the broader scope of the development process to include life on and off the tennis court. This depth of understanding through the process of co-construction guided the study away from a linear and one-dimensional

interpretation of development and transition experiences. Consequently, the dropout label or projection was no longer accommodated within the emergent, collective tennis development narrative as it was deemed too narrow in scope.

The study consisted of a range of tennis participants ($n = 34$), i.e., tennis players ($n = 22$), tennis coaches ($n = 7$), tennis parents ($n = 3$) and tennis administrators ($n = 2$). These participants were identified as experts on the research questions and were selected using purposeful or purposive sampling, i.e., theoretical sampling and maximum variation sampling. Data collection commenced after ethical approval by my Institution's Research Ethics Committee was received. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool augmented with observational work. Theory generation adhered to the procedures for constructivist GT analysis (initial codes, focused codes, categories and categories underpinning theory). At the theory-building phase, abduction was employed to test the theoretical explanation against data from coaches, parents and administrators. As a result, a GT model that explains South African men's tennis player development and transition processes was developed.

The theoretical model generated in this study consists of eight core categories and four sub-categories. The four sub-categories are not stand-alone categories. Their purpose, however, is to add another layer of complexity to four of the core categories. The eight categories are: 1) Pursuing a rich man's sport, 2) Transitioning steps, 3) Playing inside the lines [small world], 4) SA Coaching world, 5) Life orbiting tennis, 6) College: Driving the tennis vehicle, 7) Manhood eclipsing childhood, and 8) Being a pro at life not tennis. The four sub-categories are linked to the core categories: 1) Running a small business: Pro tennis links to category one, 2) Playing for a team: Doubles format links to category two, 3) Not being sculpted in clay links to category three and, 4) Being a regular school boy links to category five.

The broad, contextual scope of tennis player development and transitions is captured in this theoretical model. Firstly, it recognises the human experience of transitioning through the expected life stages, i.e., childhood, adolescence and manhood. Secondly, through this lens, the South African tennis player development and transition experience is understood and explained within an appropriate context, i.e., a developing person who plays tennis.

Considering the South African tennis player context, Table 5.1 presents each of the research questions framed in Chapter 1 along with a synthesis of the collective answers co-constructed and interpreted from the players themselves.

Table 5.1. The players' box: Collective answers to the research questions

Research Question	Answers
1. What is happening in the development process of a promising competitive junior tennis player in the Western Cape, South Africa?	Tennis development is not a stand-alone process, but rather dynamic and occurring simultaneously with human development across the lifespan. Considering this, decision-making around long-term continuation in tennis requires consideration for the simultaneous life transition, i.e., normative and expected transitions from childhood into adolescence and into adulthood. These transitions are not unique to the sport domain, however, their complexity can be underrepresented and misunderstood if one adopts a linear approach to tennis development. This complexity is unpacked in the answers to the three sub-questions below.
2. What is happening [on and off the court] in the development these players?	During childhood, South African tennis players' experiences with tennis were predominantly positive and fun. Much of these entry level experiences can be traced back to a good, enthusiastic coach, encouragement from parents and an enjoyable group lesson dynamic, where these players' development was positively reinforced. These initial experiences encouraged players to want to play more tennis. Some players attributed the desire for more tennis to their competitive nature - their performance(s) were important to them. For others, the whole tennis package of training, competing, and traveling with their academy or high school team was appealing to them. With age, came more training and competition commitments, especially in the mid to late teen years. Very quickly, tennis participation became all-consuming and had to be accommodated in the regular school day. Tennis commitments were in conflict with other school sports and schoolwork. In order to travel for tennis, players missed large periods of the school term and some struggled to catch up, consequently falling behind in their schoolwork. By late high school, some players realised that they wanted to do other things as they developed other interests

and hobbies. Others moved back into team sports to enjoy their last few years of being a regular schoolboy with their friends and to have a social life. Some players expressed that they became fatigued or struggled with burnout due to years of tennis investment.

A few players, however, chose to give tennis a real go and opted for the home-schooling route to accommodate their tennis schedule. Intensive training and travel ensued with players comparing their tennis life to a full time job. This investment in tennis, for the home-schooled players, resulted in recruitment offers from USA collegiate tennis coaches. Players who did not pursue home schooling, but still chose to pursue tennis also opted for the collegiate tennis route over the professional route. The USA collegiate pathway was deemed an attractive route for South African tennis players as well as their families, especially compared to the exorbitant costs of going pro. College tennis represented a dual pursuit, i.e., obtaining a tertiary qualification and a chance to play semi-professional tennis for four years.

3. What are the transitional processes throughout the junior career pathway and how do we understand these transitions?

Considering the development answer above (research question two), the transitional processes relating to tennis took shape and were underpinned by the movement from childhood to adolescence. In short, of the 22 South African tennis players that were interviewed, only two players had pursued or are actively pursuing professional tennis careers. For most of the players, thoughts of a professional tennis path were traced back to their childhood and positive experiences with tennis. Over time and with age, intensive training and exposure to international competition resulted in players taking stock of their tennis options and futures in the game. For many, the sacrificial aspects, in terms of time, finances, social and team sport pursuits, influenced their decision-making about the collegiate path; the professional path was no longer an option for them. Consequently, some players chose to pursue their studies at South African tertiary institutions where tennis became more of a social pursuit.

For the collegiate players, tennis was a vehicle to move into the next phase of their lives. This phase, although uncharted terrain, provided a safer

transition into adulthood. For many of these players, college tennis was a big accomplishment and learning curve. From this vantage point, South African players, opted to complete their four years of collegiate tennis, graduate and move into the work force with a job that paid the bills. For some, a tennis coaching job was deemed a good transition into the next phase of their lives as they could still be around the game they knew and loved. As far as professional tennis goes, many had no further aspirations of such a pursuit, while others had aspirations of a career in tennis, but the realities of extensive and prolonged financial support dissuaded them from this pursuit. The added element of a solitary life on tour and on a tight budget, quickly became unappealing to many.

<p>4. How do men's tennis players [with a promising national junior ranking] transition out of the professional player pathway?</p>	<p>South African tennis players, as they transitioned through life, realised that a professional career in tennis was not something they wanted to pursue anymore. For most players, the lessons learned and the growth that occurred through tennis positively impacted their lives and helped them transition into the next phase of life, i.e., from adolescence into early adulthood. For some players, this took shape through the use of tennis as a way to secure a USA tennis scholarship and to pursue a dual-career as student-athlete. Other players opted for further studies at South African tertiary institutions.</p> <p>Some players transitioned into coaching as their entry level job. One player is a professional tennis player. Another player is in pursuit of a professional career in tennis.</p>
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5.2. Limitations

The study was delimited to South African men's tennis players in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. This was intentional from the beginning as the study's primary focus was on development and transitions in the men's game in one province. This, in and of itself, is not a limitation. However, a limitation could be that participants' collective voice was only represented by one South African province in particular. Another limitation was that some data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to embargoes on in-person research, some of the interviews, for example, took place by telephone and not in-person, as was the original plan. Thirdly, a pure qualitative study provided depth of understanding and subjective meaning to participant experiences, however, a mixed

methods approach with two data sets (quantitative and qualitative) could have provided another layer of insight to the tennis development and transition context.

5.3. Recommendations

The recommendations from this study are directed at specific audiences, namely: future researchers, Tennis South Africa (TSA), and stakeholders (parents, coaches and players).

5.3.1. Recommendations for future research

The human condition or human experience of South African tennis players were highlighted in this study. This was done through accommodating tennis development and transitions within the broader life domain. Future research on tennis players could employ mixed methods approaches to investigate tennis specific attributes of the developing person within tennis by using quantitative and qualitative strategies. For example, quantitative data such as ranking milestones, age of specialisation, development stages, and international tennis benchmarks, could provide another layer to the tennis player profile that is sport specific. This data could then be merged with qualitative strategies that focus on subjective meaning of these processes within player trajectories, i.e., mixed method methodologies.

Secondly, due to the research approach employed, i.e., GT, future research on South African tennis players could test this theoretical model using quantitative methods.

Thirdly, it is recommended that future research in tennis expand this study to articulate research questions on development and transitions specific to women's tennis and to include other regions in the country.

Fourthly, it is recommended that future research in junior tennis consider individual (development) differences underpinned by biological maturity. Age group tennis categories do not adequately capture the complexity of the developing tennis player. Further research is needed to broaden our understanding of this complexity.

Finally, it is recommended that future researchers consider using alternative research philosophies when investigating people in the sport environment. For example, moving away from positivist and /

or post-positivist philosophies, would accommodate the subjectivity and nuances of the human experience in sport. For example, the broader life and sporting world inhabited by athletes would be understood through a dynamic and non-isolated lens that contextualises individual and / or collective experiences that transcend sport.

5.3.2. Recommendations for Tennis South Africa (TSA)

The theoretical model developed through this study, assists in conceptualizing tennis within the broader life context. It is, therefore, an important framework for providing necessary understanding and directive, i.e., implications for practice. Tennis South Africa's (TSA) current long-term player development model (LTPD) generically and collectively attempts to accommodate South African players in a long-term development plan. However, without context and individual experiences of junior to senior transitions, i.e., sport within life domains, the South African tennis player remains (figuratively) confined to a linear, reductionist and prescriptive approach to development and the complexity of their path is grossly misunderstood and misrepresented.

The current South African LTPD model is one-dimensional and inefficient in capturing the individual differences and experiences of junior tennis players and their transitions within the game. Currently the individual is absorbed and overshadowed by the collective. Considering this, it is recommended that the LTPD model be augmented and / or supplemented with the theoretical model presented in this study as well as other models that accommodate for growth, maturation, etc.. Doing so would assist in moving away from a rigid and linear approach to tennis development. Furthermore, this adjustment in rationale and thinking would require a re-evaluation of the LTPD model. Two poignant questions for TSA are proposed: 1) Is this model designed to accommodate the transitions from childhood, through adolescence and into early adulthood, and 2) What is the overall end goal of a long-term development framework for South African tennis players?

Considering this, and the need to translate theory to practice, practical recommendations for TSA are provided below:

1. The doubles format within South African tennis should be appropriately accommodated and incorporated on two levels:
 - 1.1. As a development and / or transition pathway that augments the development of junior players with the singles format, i.e., in drill sessions, competitive match play etc. Utilizing the doubles

format provides an additional outlet for fun and enjoyment while alleviating pressures, especially within younger age groups. Moreover, doubles emphasizes the team aspect of the sport, which is less isolating than the singles format, both on the court and in respect to traveling to tournaments. It has also been shown to reduce performance anxiety.

- 1.2. As a clear-cut pathway and / or transition into professional tennis for players who are pursuing the professional pathway. Doubles should not be relegated to a lesser status than the singles format. Not only is doubles a mechanism for a professional tennis transition, it is a stand-alone format that needs to be accommodated within the tennis development and transition context. Doubles, as this study shows, is an untapped vehicle and resource within South African tennis and could be accommodated within a long-term development plan.
2. Provision and / or hosting of International Tennis Federation (ITF) tournaments should be at the level appropriate for South African tennis players. Currently there are insufficient ITF Juniors and Futures events hosted annually in South Africa forcing players to migrate overseas for international tennis competition. It is, therefore, recommended that more ITF Juniors and Futures tournaments be hosted annually, specifically ones that accommodate the development level of South African players.

5.3.3. Recommendations for stakeholders (parents, coaches and players)

Listening to, and understanding, the junior tennis player at different stages of development is key in navigating the dynamic nature of the junior to senior transition process. Furthermore, open lines of communication between parent(s), coach(es) and tennis player(s) should be emphasised throughout this process and should be continuous. For example, parents and coaches should regularly check in with players especially during the early to late teen years when intensity of training/competition increases. These discussions can be logged and monitored to help guide future discussions. Topics of discussion could include physical and / or psychosocial preparedness for competition, short-term and long-term goals (for tennis and life). Parents, coaches and players should reflect on these conversations and use them as a basis for planning sessions, goal setting (aligned with their respective expectations) and as a general indicator of enjoyment and commitment to competitive tennis.

Placing the junior tennis player within the appropriate development context, i.e., the big picture of child first and tennis player second, is summarized by the following conclusions drawn from the GT model: 1) Getting fitted and trying on for size, 2) growing into, 3) growing out of, 4) going beyond the net, 5) getting a different pair of shoes and 6) going beyond the court.

This shoe analogy, denoting the larger story within the theoretical model, can be utilized to translate theory to practice. Table 5.2 presents a practical checklist to guide parents, coaches and players through critical moments of a junior tennis player journey. Recognizing and understanding these critical moments can provide insight for making informed decisions about players' futures in the sport.

Table 5.2. Conclusions and implications from theory

Conclusions	Implications
1) Getting fitted and trying on for size	<p>The novelty of being introduced to tennis and the enjoyment of these entry-level experiences should be acknowledged and encouraged by parents and coaches.</p> <p>During this exploratory (trying on) phase, children should be accommodated in a fun, learning environment that is less intense and less tennis specific. Having a good coach that is trained and equipped in U/10 tennis is a key ingredient in this initial phase. The group tennis dynamic should also be emphasised to encourage the importance of playing/learning in a team.</p>
2) Growing into	<p>The growing into phase, is a phase where players are interested in continuing with tennis and are needing to make decisions around the intensity of this pursuit. This phase, if not understood and monitored with care, can lead to players becoming overloaded with tennis commitments over and above their commitments outside of tennis. Parents and coaches should openly discuss the ramifications of an increased tennis load and its effect on regular school and life commitments, etc. Educators, such as schoolteachers and tutors, should also be consulted during this phase. Boundaries and priorities need to be clear and translatable into a user-friendly plan to help players monitor their time and commitments without forfeiting their normal/expected transitions from childhood to adolescence. It is advisable to monitor the verbal and non-verbal cues of players' enthusiasm and</p>

enjoyment for the sport during this phase. Moreover, ask probing questions to gauge the players' understanding of what it means to be a competitive tennis player. Are they willing to sacrifice for tennis, and if so, to what degree?

3) Growing out of

The growing out of phase, is not a clear-cut linear phase. However, it is a phase that players can reach at different times throughout the junior to senior transitions. Competing interests with schoolwork, team sports, social networks and / or a general sense of fatigue due to the commitment of a full-time tennis schedule collectively contribute to players reaching a crossroads in their tennis journey. Parents, coaches and players should reflect on these moments and openly discuss goals and align priorities and expectations of the next phase of their lives, i.e., early adulthood. The key here is that life and sport goals are clearly defined and understood. Do players know what these are? Moreover, are players provided a mentorship support system to guide them through these transitioning steps?

Coaches should be transparent about their level of expertise during this phase to help players transition. If there is a shortfall in expertise in helping players transition, then networks and additional resources should be consulted to guide players in making the best, appropriate decision(s) for the next step.

4) Going beyond the net

During this phase of transition, i.e., late adolescence, players are confronted with decisions outside of tennis that influence their degree of continuation in competitive tennis. It is at this phase that players are presented with opportunities that transcend the sport and consequently drive and / or dictate their commitment to the sport. For example, attending a tertiary academic institution may present players with opportunities for club and league tennis, however, their studies become prioritised over tennis. Alternatively, players who transition into the USA collegiate pathway may do so as a vehicle to better themselves for a life after tennis, not necessarily as a stepping-stone into professional tennis. Parents and coaches should be aware that this transition is unique to individual players and their individual journeys. It is important to note, however, that this phase is uncharted /unfamiliar terrain for players. Without having positive reinforcement and a tangible reference from coaches or former players who have done it before, players can feel unprepared for this next phase. This makes the adjustment,

whether in tennis or out of tennis a challenging path to navigate. Player support is key in this phase.

5) Getting a different pair of shoes

Getting a different pair of shoes, is a multi-faceted phase. In other words, players during this phase could have tennis shoes on, regular shoes on, or wear mismatched shoes (one tennis shoe and one regular shoe). This denotes a phase of considerable adjustment from late adolescence to early adulthood. Players in this phase have completed or are nearing completion of their junior tennis career. The tennis-ranking clock resets at the age of 18 years and players who aspire to continue with competitive tennis are confronted with two paths: the professional tennis path or USA collegiate path. Parents, coaches and players should approach this phase with strategy and rigour, i.e., exhausting informational resources to make an informed decision. For example, not every USA collegiate programme is the same. Moreover, players must be informed and aware that the team environment is prioritized in the collegiate environment. The South African junior tennis environment caters more to the individual and individual performances. Adjusting to the collegiate environment is a big adjustment for many South African tennis players, both in terms of the level of tennis in college and the academic expectations of maintaining a certain Grade Point Average (GPA) to remain eligible to play and compete. Parents, coaches and players should weigh up all the pros and cons of such a pursuit as there is no one size fits all approach to this decision.

6) Going beyond the court

Transitioning into early adulthood is represented in this next phase, i.e., going beyond the court phase. For some players, their whole life revolved around tennis as a child and adolescent, and early adulthood represents a time of exploring other interests away from the court. This phase is tricky to navigate and understand for some players as it represents an end to a childhood dream. Parents, coaches and players should acknowledge and accommodate a sense of loss and / or letting go as they move through this phase. For some players, moving into social tennis and / or tennis coaching may be a way of remaining connected to the sport. Whatever the next step in this phase, parents, coaches and players should acknowledge the underlying reasons for this pursuit that is unique to their individual experience as

opposed to projecting a failed expectation, i.e., a professional tennis career that was not realized or attained. Considering this, it is vitally important for coaches to communicate to players early on in their junior careers what the benchmarks are for them to compete at the highest level of the game, i.e., playing and performing well at the junior grand slam events. Without tangible, measurable benchmarks, players and parents are left to make decisions about their futures in the game that are incongruent with their goals and long-term development focus. It is the coaches' responsibility, supported by TSA, to present consistent match play for players to test themselves. International competition in reasonable, controlled amounts, dependent upon age, maturity and level, i.e., ITF Juniors and Futures, should be available to players to assist with their junior to senior transition. Without exposure and competition, players have no measuring stick of where they are and where they need to be for competitive tennis.

The going beyond the court phase, for some players, can be linked back to a plateau in international competition and exposure for junior players in their late teens. Parents and coaches should be aware of this plateau in helping players adjust and make informed decisions regarding their futures in the sport.

Coaches, in particular, are responsible for providing sufficient match play opportunities for their players. Academies and high school set-ups working in silos to protect their own interests are hindering player development in South Africa. Simulating regular competitive, pressure filled match play scenarios against stronger opponents is needed to help players improve and prepare for national and international competition. Coaches are admonished to work collaboratively, i.e., with other academies and high school programmes in their area to make these opportunities readily available to players.

It is clear that a one size fits all approach to tennis development and transitions in South Africa is not representative of the player experience. The tennis player journey is a unique one that should be accommodated within various environments, i.e., family, school, tennis academy, etc. By placing greater emphasis on the developing person, the process of tennis development and transitions will be appropriately understood and represented in a long-term development framework.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Observational protocol 2018

International Tennis Federation (ITF) tournaments

1. The intent of this type of qualitative research is to immerse in the culture and ‘world’ of the elite tennis players’ interactions with parents, family members, coaches, officials, peers, competitors, fans, etc. for understanding, in greater depth, the competitive environment of an elite South African tennis player, both at the junior (under 18 yrs.) and open (over 18 yrs.) level of competition.
2. Tennis players’ emotional experiences during tournament play. For example, from my observation, are tennis players anxiety, stress levels, and over-all emotional state, influenced by their social interactions with their social agents (parents & coaches)? What is noted by their mood and temperament on and off the court? From my observation, are players, specifically at the junior level, enjoying themselves and having fun? What pressures from parents and coaches are being observed on and off the court? What kind of support is offered from parents and coaches, during a win and or a loss?
3. Body language, verbal and non-verbal cues from parents and coaches during matches will also be closely monitored and observed.

APPENDIX B

Semi-structured interview protocol for South African tennis players

Tennis background

1. What is your relationship to tennis –player, parent / coach / enthusiast / sport management / admin, etc.?
2. Please tell me a little more about yourself and your experiences with tennis?
3. What are your thoughts on the junior tennis player pathway in South Africa? And in the Western Cape? (Probes: tournaments, finances, ranking, coaches, pressures, national junior team selection, school tennis, etc.)
4. From your tennis experiences, please walk me through the steps of how a junior tennis player becomes a pro?
5. What are your experiences and or understanding of the U.S.A college tennis system? Please explain?
6. What do you think are some of the reasons for our junior tennis players not turning pro?

Summary:

- Please remind me of your age again?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add/ what advice would you give an up and coming junior from the Western Cape?

APPENDIX C

Semi-structured interview protocol for South African tennis coaches

Tennis background

- Developmental coach / high performance coach /? _____
 - Number of years coaching? _____
 - Number of years coaching in WP? _____
1. What is your relationship to tennis – parent / coach / enthusiast / sport management / admin, etc.?
 2. Please tell me a little more about yourself and your experiences with tennis?
 3. What are your thoughts on the junior tennis player pathway in South Africa? And in the Western Cape? (Probes: tournaments, finances, ranking, coaches, pressures, national junior team selection, school tennis, etc.)
 4. From your tennis experiences, please walk me through the steps of how a junior tennis player becomes a pro?
 5. What are your experiences and or understanding of the U.S.A college tennis system? Please explain?
 6. Do you know of any South African male tennis player from the Western Cape that quit tennis?
 7. If yes, please tell me a little more? Did they have a ‘shot’ at turning pro (in your opinion)?
 8. What do you think are some of the reasons for our junior tennis players not turning pro?

OR

9. How does a talented (top SA junior) tennis player drop out of tennis?

APPENDIX D

Semi-structured interview protocol for tennis parents and administrators

Tennis background

1. What is your relationship to tennis – parent / coach / enthusiast / sport management / admin, etc.?
2. Please tell me a little more about yourself and your experiences with tennis?
3. What are your thoughts on the junior tennis player pathway in South Africa? And in the Western Cape? (Probes: tournaments, finances, ranking, coaches, pressures, national junior team selection, school tennis, etc.)
4. Walk me through some of your experiences of junior tennis development in the Western Cape?
5. Please walk me through the steps of how a junior tennis player becomes a pro?
6. What are your experiences and or understanding of the U.S.A college tennis system? Please explain?
7. Do you know of any South African male tennis player from the Western Cape that quit tennis? If yes, please tell me a little more? Did they have a ‘shot’ at turning pro (in your opinion)?
8. What do you think are some of the reasons for our junior tennis players not turning pro?

APPENDIX E

Ethics Approval Notice (A)



UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

NOTICE OF APPROVAL

Response to stipulations

30 May 2017

Project number: SU-HSD-004442

Project title: A Systems Perspective on Tennis Development in South Africa: Analysing Factors That Influence Dropout and Investment Decisions of Junior Players

Dear Deborah Skinstad

Your new application submitted on 9 May 2017 was reviewed by the REC: Humanities and has been accepted. Please note the following about your approved submission:

Ethics approval period: 25 April 2017 – 24 April 2020

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (SU-HSD-004442) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

Investigator Responsibilities

Protection of Human Research Participants

1. Some of the general responsibilities investigators have when conducting research involving human participants are listed below:
2. **Conducting the Research.** You are responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC approved research protocol. You are also responsible for the actions of all your co-investigators and research staff involved with this research. You must also ensure that the research is conducted within the standards of your field of research.
3. **Participant Enrolment.** You may not recruit or enrol participants prior to the REC approval date or after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials for any form of media must be approved by the REC prior to their use.
4. **Informed Consent.** You are responsible for obtaining and documenting effective informed consent using only the REC- approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no human participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their informed consent. Please give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents. Keep the originals in your secured research files for at least five (5) years.
5. **Continuing Review.** The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is no grace period. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, it is your responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur. If REC approval of your research lapses, you must stop new participant enrolment, and contact the REC office immediately.
6. **Amendments and Changes.** If you wish to amend or change any aspect of your research (such as research design, interventions or procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material), you must submit the amendment to the REC for review using the current Amendment Form. You may not initiate any amendments or changes to your research without first obtaining written REC review and

- approval. The only exception is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.
7. Adverse or Unanticipated Events. Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to Malene Fouche within five (5) days of discovery of the incident. You must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants. The only exception to this policy is that the death of a research participant must be reported in accordance with the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee Standard Operating Procedures. All reportable events should be submitted to the REC using the Serious Adverse Event Report Form.
 8. Research Record Keeping. You must keep the following research related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence from the REC
 9. Provision of Counselling or emergency support. When a dedicated counsellor or psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.
 10. Final reports. When you have completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions or interventions) or stopped work on your research, you must submit a Final Report to the REC.
 11. On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits. If you are notified that your research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, you must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

APPENDIX F

Ethics Approval Notice (B)



UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

REC Humanities Amendment Form

28 January 2019

Project number: 3276

Project Title: A Systems Perspective on Tennis Development in South Africa: Analysing Factors That Influence Dropout and Investment Decisions of Junior Players

Dear Miss Deborah Skinstad

Your response to stipulations submitted on 21 January 2019 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Humanities. Please note the following for your approved submission:

Ethics approval period:

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
25 April 2017	24 April 2020

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: Humanities, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.

Please use your SU project number (3276) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

FOR CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

Please note that a progress report should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary)

Included Documents:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Default	[REDACTED]	27/08/2018	Screen shot e-mail
Research	SU-HSD-004442 Deb Skinstad Amended PhD Proposal August 30 2018	30/08/2018	Amended
Protocol/Proposal	Observation Script 2018	30/08/2018	Script 2018
Data collection tool	Response to REC stipulations	16/01/2019	Cover letter
Default	[REDACTED] - 27 Aug 2018 [REDACTED]	16/01/2019	[REDACTED]
Default	Permission letter Ethics request		letter

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at

[REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.

The Research Ethics Committee: Humanities complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

Investigator Responsibilities

Protection of Human Research Participants

1. Some of the general responsibilities investigators have when conducting research involving human participants are listed below:
2. **Conducting the Research.** You are responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC approved research protocol. You are also responsible for the actions of all your co-investigators and research staff involved with this research. You must also ensure that the research is conducted within the standards of your field of research.
3. **Participant Enrolment.** You may not recruit or enrol participants prior to the REC approval date or after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials for any form of media must be approved by the REC prior to their use.
4. **Informed Consent.** You are responsible for obtaining and documenting effective informed consent using only the REC- approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no human participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their informed consent. Please give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents. Keep the originals in your secured research files for at least five (5) years.
5. **Continuing Review.** The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is no grace period. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, it is your responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur. If REC approval of your research lapses, you must stop new participant enrolment, and contact the REC office immediately.
6. **Amendments and Changes.** If you wish to amend or change any aspect of your research (such as research design, interventions or procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material), you must submit the amendment to the REC for review using the current Amendment Form. You may not initiate any amendments or changes to your research without first obtaining written REC review and approval. The only exception is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.
7. **Adverse or Unanticipated Events.** Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to

Malene Fouche within five (5) days of discovery of the incident. You must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants. The only exception to this policy is that the death of a research participant must be reported in accordance with the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee Standard Operating Procedures. All reportable events should be submitted to the REC using the Serious Adverse Event Report Form.

8. **Research Record Keeping.** You must keep the following research related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence from the REC
9. **Provision of Counselling or emergency support.** When a dedicated counsellor or psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.
10. **Final reports.** When you have completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions or interventions) or stopped work on your research, you must submit a Final Report to the REC.
11. **On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits.** If you are notified that your research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, you must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

APPENDIX G

Informed consent form for South African men's tennis players



UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of the Study: A systems perspective on tennis development in South Africa: Analysing factors that influence dropout and investment decisions of junior players

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by primary researcher: Deborah A. Skinstad, M.A. Deborah, or Deb, holds the office of Junior Lecturer in the Department of Sport Science at Stellenbosch University and is currently doing her PhD on tennis dropout in the Western Cape, South Africa.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you played competitively as a junior tennis player in South Africa. Your experience and ultimately your personal tennis journey/story could add great value to this study. *Please consider sharing...*

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the tennis development history of South African junior tennis players, on and off the court, that influence their decisions to dropout or invest in tennis

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would like to interview you about your tennis playing history and your life as a tennis player both on and off the court.

A) INTERVIEWS

1. First interview:

During the interview, the interviewer will ask questions about your experience as a junior tennis player: practice hours, training, coaching, matches, etc. These questions will help the interviewer better understand you, the participant, as a junior tennis player – in other words, your junior tennis profile. This stage of the interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.

2. Follow up interview(s):

After the first interview, the information (data) will be analyzed. During this process, more questions may arise pertaining to your journey / story as a junior tennis player. This may lead the interviewer (Deb) to do a follow up interview (either in person, over the phone or using Skype).

B) LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

All interview visits will be planned and scheduled in advance. Interviews will be conducted one on one at a place and time that is convenient to both researcher and participant. Interviews may also be conducted telephonically or using Skype for convenience purposes. The primary researcher, Ms. Deborah Skinstad, will be conducting all the interviews throughout the Western Cape.

Also, the two (potential) interviews will NOT be done on the same day.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The only potential discomfort to the participant could be the length of the interviews.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

As a participant in the study, you will not receive any monetary reward. However, by participating in the study, you will be adding great value to the science behind junior tennis development, not only in South Africa but also in the world.

As a former competitive junior tennis player, you get to share your tennis development journey, and it may end up helping other South African junior tennis players with their tennis development in the future.

It is hoped that this study will add to the ongoing dialogue/discussion surrounding junior tennis development in South Africa. There are currently a lot of questions on this topic, so hopefully this study, with your help, can provide some answers.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

As a participant in the study, you will not receive any monetary reward for your participation.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Also, all interviews (in person and or telephonically /Skype) will be recorded using a voice recorder and later documented using transcription procedures. This information can be disclosed to the participant, if they wish to review it.

All information will remain confidential during and after of the study. All participants will remain unnamed and will be assigned a numerical value and code to identify their information (age, gender, race, etc.) so as to ensure confidentiality. To ensure confidentiality, all data collected throughout the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office for printed material. All digital material will be protected by a password – only known to the primary researcher.

The information collected from the participants will be published as part of the PhD study requirements, however, no confidential information will be disclosed.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

1. Primary Researcher: Deborah A. Skinstad

██████████

██████████

2. PhD Promoter(Supervisor): Dr. Heinrich Grobbelaar

██████████

██████████

3. PhD Co-Promoter: Prof. Elmarie Terblanche

██████████

██████████

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact ██████████ ██████████ [██████████] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me [the participant] by [Deborah Skinstad,] in [Afrikaans/English/Xhosa/other] and [I the participant] is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to [me]. I, [the participant] was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to [my] satisfaction.

[I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the subject/participant*] and/or [his/her] representative _____ [*name of the representative*]. [He/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in [Afrikaans/*English/*Xhosa/*Other] and [no translator was used/this conversation was translated into _____ by _____].

APPENDIX H

Informed consent form for South African tennis role players [parent, coach, tennis administrator]



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of the Study: A systems perspective on tennis development in South Africa: Analysing factors that influence dropout and investment decisions of junior players

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by primary researcher: Deborah A. Skinstad, M.A. Deborah, or Deb, holds the office of Junior Lecturer in the Department of Sport Science at Stellenbosch University and is currently doing her PhD on tennis dropout in the Western Cape, South Africa.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are part of / involved with the competitive tennis environment in South Africa – either as an administrator, tennis coach or tennis parent. Your experience and ultimately your personal tennis journey/story could add great value to this study. *Please consider sharing...*

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe the tennis development history of South African junior tennis players, on and off the court, that influence their decisions to dropout or invest in tennis

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would like to interview you about your experience with the South African competitive junior tennis pathway and environment.

A) INTERVIEWS

1. First interview:

During the interview, the interviewer will ask questions about your experience as an administrator, tennis coach or tennis parent. These questions will help the interviewer better understand the context and competitive nature of tennis development in South Africa – in particular the Western Cape. This stage of the interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.

2. Follow up interview(s):

After the first interview, the information (data) will be analyzed. During this process, more questions may arise pertaining to your experiences as an administrator, tennis coach or tennis parent. This may lead the interviewer (Deb) to do a follow up interview (either in person, over the phone or using Skype).

B) LOCATION OF INTERVIEWS

All interview visits will be planned and scheduled in advance. Interviews will be conducted one on one at a place and time that is convenient to both researcher and participant. Interviews may also be conducted telephonically or using Skype for convenience purposes. The primary researcher, Ms. Deborah Skinstad, will be conducting all the interviews throughout the Western Cape.

Also, the two interviews will NOT be done on the same day.

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The only potential discomfort to the participant could be the length of the interviews.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

As a participant in the study, you will not receive any monetary reward. However, by participating in the study, you will be adding great value to the science behind junior tennis development, not only in South Africa but also in the world.

It is hoped that this study will add to the ongoing dialogue/discussion surrounding junior tennis development in South Africa. There are currently a lot of questions on this topic, so hopefully this study, with your help, can provide some answers.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

As a participant in the study, you will not receive any monetary reward for your participation.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Also, all interviews (in person and or telephonically /Skype) will be recorded using a voice recorder and later documented using transcription procedures. This information can be disclosed to the participant, if they wish to review it.

All information will remain confidential during and after of the study. All participants will remain unnamed and will be assigned a numerical value and code to identify their information (age, gender, race, etc.) so as to ensure confidentiality. To ensure confidentiality, all data collected throughout the study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office for printed material. All digital material will be protected by a password – only known to the primary researcher.

The information collected from the participants will be published as part of the PhD study requirements, however, no confidential information will be disclosed.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Primary Researcher: Deborah A. Skinstad
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

PhD Promoter(Supervisor): Dr. Heinrich Grobbelaar
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

PhD Co-Promoter: Prof. Elmarie Terblanche
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [REDACTED] at the Division for Research Development.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to me [the participant] by [Deborah Skinstad,] in [Afrikaans/English/Xhosa/other] and [I the participant] is in command of this language or it was satisfactorily translated to [me]. I, [the participant] was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to [my] satisfaction.

[I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study/I hereby consent that the subject/participant may participate in this study.] I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject/Participant

Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

Signature of Subject/Participant or Legal Representative

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the subject/participant*] and/or [his/her] representative _____ [*name of the representative*]. [He/she] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in [*Afrikaans/*English/*Xhosa/*Other*] and [*no translator was used/this conversation was translated into _____ by _____*].

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX I

Researchers' cut: Literature section that did not make the Ph.D. canon

Appendix I reflects important information to the literature review originally included in the Ph.D. canon that I submitted for examination (dated October 15, 2021). This section, however, did not make the cut as per my examiners recommendations / suggestions, as they considered the placement thereof as a detour and obstruction to the flow of a conventional Ph.D. literature review chapter. I trust that by removing this section (detour) the flow of the final product has been strengthened and more 'user-friendly' for a wide readership, i.e., quantitative and qualitative researchers. To remain true to my unconventional (road less travelled) approach of my six-year journey, I have decided to retain this vulnerable part of the journey. My reasoning here is that this information (behind the scenes) may bring some encouragement to future Ph.D. students, who like me, felt / feel out of their depths when first embarking on a Ph.D. journey. The section below is the original pretext to my literature chapter, which attempted to show the messy / vulnerable parts of my Ph.D. journey....

Original pretext to the literature review chapter...

To say that I was not influenced by literature in youth sport and tennis when I started this Ph.D. journey would be untrue. I was heavily influenced by literature and quite well versed on some trending topics that were of interest to me, especially when augmenting my sport science lens with my behavioural health science training. In addition, I immersed myself in the literature before heading into the field. One of the reasons for this was my insatiable pursuit to know more. I was eager to get a better understanding of the landscape and context that I was exploring and, overall, I was excited about the novelty of it all.

*I was fortunate, at the time, to be in ongoing discussions with, arguably, one of the world's leading medical experts in youth sport and tennis medicine, Dr Neeru Jayanthi. These discussions pointed me toward relevant literature and put me in contact with leading scholars, including an opportunity to co-author a book chapter with him entitled: *Tennis injuries in adolescents* (Jayanthi & Skinstad, 2016). My primary contribution to this chapter was a review of tennis injury literature in the developing tennis player. As you will notice in the methodology section in Chapter 2 my Ph.D. journey took many twists and turns; this collaboration – although I am forever grateful for the opportunity – was one of them. Moreover, some of the earlier*

decisions I made in my quest to know included much networking. I read books and articles on topics of interest within youth sport and tennis, then intentionally looked for contact information or social media handles of the authors and reached out to them. These ‘shout outs’ all started in a similar way, ‘Greetings from South Africa’ or ‘from South Africa with gratitude’. My motivation and intention was to put myself in the expert’s way and learn from them. I guess my enthusiastic and somewhat naïve messages worked, because I received many favourable responses and meeting requests.

With this networking came opportunities to collaborate and learn from some of the leading scholars in youth sport, which provided much valuable context and aided my understanding of children in sport. The problem for me was not being new to networking, but being new to the Ph.D. journey and structure within a South African context. I started my Ph.D. journey not long after returning to South Africa after living in the United States of America (USA) for 12 consecutive years. Also, a year after registering for my Ph.D. I started a new job as a full-time academic at Stellenbosch University. Juggling a full-time job along with part-time studies presented unique challenges at times. My time in the USA brought me out of my introverted shell, made me quite bold, confident and increased my headstrong approach. In many ways, I had to fend for myself in the USA, so regrettably, I did not have much patience when a seemingly good idea popped into my head and I wanted to follow it. So, why is this information important in this section? As part of my “confessional tales” (Sparkes & Smith 2014, p. 157) of this journey, it is important to reveal the messy bits of this pursuit – the tension experienced with the literature and eventual literature placement – and the learning and growing that occurred during the process. In keeping with this disclosure, it must be stated that I struggled in the early part of the journey with all the information, knowledge and learning opportunities presented to me. Quite simply, it was overwhelming at times – the information, the willingness of the leading scholars to share their wealth of expertise and my surprise at how seemingly easy it was to connect with scholars across the globe.

*Much of what I learned during this meandering time in the early stages of my Ph.D. pertains to the background literature that was meant for this chapter. Consequently, this information landed up on memo’s, my methodological journals, some on previous drafts, and some in a published piece, titled: *I’m not a quitter. I just quit tennis! Normalizing the human experience**

in athlete development to understand factors influencing dropout and attrition in junior tennis (Skinstad, 2018). Thinking back, I consider this another thorn in my side, and a regrettable move. Moreover, this meandering off the beaten path affected my supervisee-supervisor relationship(s), as I tended to follow leads, ideas and advice of scholars outside this relationship instead of focusing on the task at hand. In hindsight, I regret and am apologetic for jumping the gun at times and not consulting my supervisory team who were eager to lend a listening ear and helping hand. It must be stated that my supervisory team did change during my Ph.D. journey – roles and members have changed. However, I remain forever grateful to past and present members for their patience, resolve and not giving up on me as I learned the hard way. Consequently, this journey has taken a lot longer than what I was anticipating and I only have my headstrong self to thank for that. Either way, here we are...

In providing this background context, it should also be noted that Chapter 1 has gone through several changes and many drafts over the years. The literature review section (Chapter 1) as it stands is a reflection of the period I was in prior to entering the field and employing a qualitative approach to research. In the beginning, I thought my knowledge and understanding of the central phenomenon and research problem was well understood – and I believe it was in context of beginning the journey of exploration. Once in the field, with observational work and then semi-structured interviews, I was humbled and amazed at how much I did not know about the individual and collective experiences of our tennis participants. So much of what I had gleaned from the literature was contextualized to a first world experience. Furthermore, I had limited reference points in the literature that explored and expounded upon South African tennis players journey's from junior to senior level.

Prior to pursuing a qualitative research design and prior to entering the field, I thought I had a good sense of the youth sport landscape and the various lines of research and methodologies underpinning the perspectives on development. However, it was only once I stepped into the field to explore the unknowns of the topical areas I was interested in did this project take shape. I was humbled and amazed at how much I still had to learn in light of the South African tennis player experiences / journeys. This is now captured in chapter 3 and discussed in chapter 4 with a broader literature base (as recommended for qualitative research designs).

My attempt to remain transparent within the dissertation (although unconventional at times) is a recurring thread and I have endeavoured to remain true to this approach. My Ph.D. as the completed canon should reflect the entirety of the research process – a process with tension, self-doubt and riddled with questions (even now) of could have, should have, would have. I have come to terms with this, however, this behind the scenes section (Appendix I) is more realistic of the unconventional path I followed. Below is some context of this unconventional path as I engaged with the literature and scholars in the early years...

Although cut from the final Ph.D. canon, I remain grateful for the opportunity to share these vulnerable, explorative and emergent qualitative experiences with you, my readership. The intention of retaining this information in this Appendix is to provide the reader with a glimpse of what happened at the genesis of the project, i.e., I entered the field with a seemingly good understanding of the broad topical areas. Only once I had elevated my participants to experts on their journeys (a hallmark of qualitative research), did I start to understand and appreciate the deeper layers and complexity of their tennis story and experiences of growing up within the South African tennis environment – the layered beauty of being human first and tennis player second.

My hope for all budding qualitative Ph.D. students reading this section is for you to be encouraged to keep going with your (messy, unconventional) exploration of the research topic. It may just be that the deeper you go in following your explorative, iterative leads, and learn from the experts, i.e., your participants, the more unconventional your research journey becomes. Although, sometimes unpopular by quantitative colleagues' lens / standards, it is completely normal for your own process and journey. In all the meandering and self-doubt, the answers to the research questions are closer than you think. If you keep going you will be amazed at what you find.