

MENTOR

Revista de Investigación Educativa y Deportiva

Volume 5

Special
Issue 4

2026

Director: Ph.D. Richar Posso Pacheco

Email: rjposso@revistamentor.ec

Website: <https://revistamentor.ec/>

Editor-in-Chief: Ph.D. Susana Paz Viteri

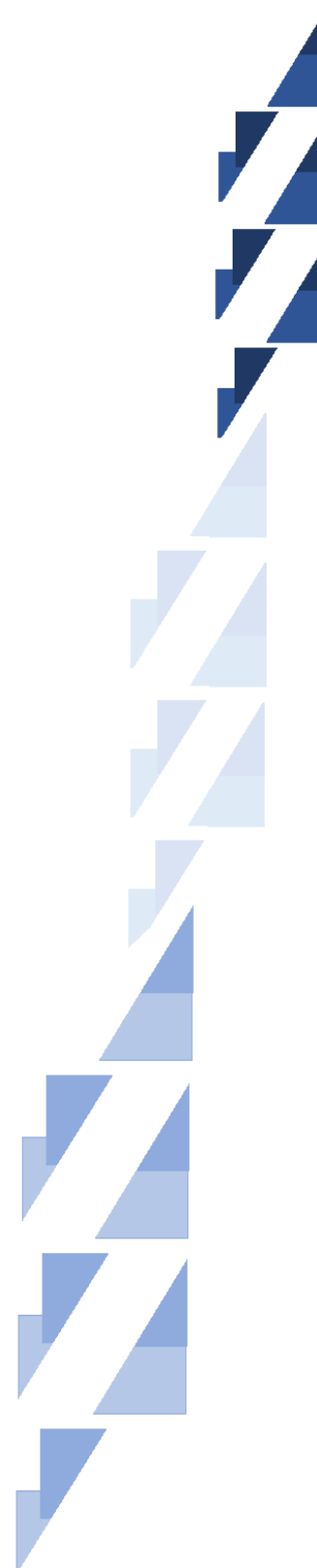
Editorial Coordinator: Ph.D. (c) Josue Marcillo Ñacato

Scientific Committee Coordinator: Ph.D. Laura Barba Miranda

Editorial Supervisor: Ph.D. Isidro Lapuente Álvarez

Editors' Committee Coordinator: Msc. María Gladys Cóndor Chicaiza

Reviewers' Board Coordinator: PhD. Javier Fernández-Rio



Articles

Influence of the family environment on the development of athletic talent in youth tennis: a documentary review

Influencia del entorno familiar en el desarrollo del talento deportivo en el tenis juvenil: una revisión documental

Richar Jacobo Posso-Pacheco ¹

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1279-9852>

Pablo Ricardo Olvera Sánchez ²

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7163-9565>

Director of MENTOR Revista de Investigación, Educativa y deportiva. Quito-Ecuador ¹
Centro Nacional de Tenis. Guayaquil, Ecuador ²

Autor de correspondencia

rjposso@revistamentor.ec

prostennis1971@gmail.com

Available online: 15-07-2026

Abstract

The family environment constitutes a decisive component in the development of athletic talent among youth tennis players. The objective of this study was to analyze the scientific evidence on the influence of the family environment on the development of athletic talent among youth tennis players. A documentary review with a systematized search and thematic synthesis was conducted in the Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed databases, considering publications available up to January 2026. Of the 312 records identified, 198 were removed as duplicates and 103 were excluded for not meeting the thematic relevance criteria; finally, 11 documents were incorporated into the main corpus of analysis. The results were organized into three axes: functions of parental support, effects of parental pressure, and moderating variables of family involvement. The evidence showed that parental support favors talent development when it promotes autonomy, emotional stability, motivation, and coordination with the coach. In contrast, result-centered pressure, criticism, excessive control, and unrealistic expectations may affect psychological well-being and weaken continued sport participation. It is concluded that the most appropriate parental support is not the most intense, but the one most closely adjusted to the developmental stage, competitive level, and psychological needs of the young tennis player.

Keywords: athletic talent; youth tennis; family environment; sport motivation; parental pressure; sport dropout.

Resumen

El entorno familiar constituye un componente decisivo en el desarrollo del talento deportivo de tenistas juveniles. El objetivo de esta investigación fue analizar la evidencia científica sobre la influencia del entorno familiar en el desarrollo del talento deportivo de tenistas juveniles. Se desarrolló una revisión documental con búsqueda sistematizada y síntesis temática en las bases de datos Scopus, Web of Science y PubMed, considerando publicaciones disponibles hasta enero de 2026. De 312 registros identificados, se eliminaron 198 por duplicación y 103 por no cumplir los criterios de pertinencia temática; finalmente, 11 documentos fueron incorporados al corpus principal de análisis. Los resultados se organizaron en tres ejes: funciones del apoyo parental, efectos de la presión parental y variables moderadoras de la implicación familiar. El apoyo parental favorece el desarrollo del talento cuando promueve autonomía, estabilidad afectiva, motivación y coordinación con el entrenador. En cambio, la presión centrada en resultados, la crítica, el control excesivo y las expectativas irreales pueden afectar el bienestar psicológico y debilitar la continuidad deportiva. Se concluye que el apoyo parental más adecuado no es el más intenso, sino el más ajustado a la etapa de desarrollo, al nivel competitivo y a las necesidades psicológicas del joven tenista.

Palabras clave: talento deportivo; tenis juvenil; entorno familiar; motivación deportiva; presión parental; abandono deportivo.

Introduction

Sporting talent does not emerge from purely individual conditions (Alarfaj et al., 2024). The trajectories of elite athletes consistently show the early and sustained involvement of family environments as agents of sport socialization, funding, transportation, and emotional regulation (Côté, 1999; Henriksen et al., 2010). In tennis, a sport that requires high economic investment, early technical specialization, and intensive logistical availability, the family assumes a role that goes beyond emotional support and becomes part of the system through which the athlete is developed (Novak et al., 2025; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005).

Talent development distinguishes between functional parental involvement, which promotes autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and the young athlete's sport identity, and dysfunctional involvement, characterized by normative pressure, excessive expectations, and excessive behavioral control (Gao et al., 2024; Ntalachani et al., 2025). These two forms of involvement often coexist within the same family unit, and their balance may change according to the stage of sport development and the age of the tennis player (Stambulova et al., 2009).

The available evidence on the specific effects of these dynamics in youth tennis remains dispersed across qualitative case studies, cross-sectional surveys, and longitudinal trajectory analyses (Cahill & MacNamara, 2025; Gould et al., 2006; Harwood & Porter, 2026; Novak et al., 2020; Pill et al., 2024). A systematic integration of this evidence is necessary to identify the differentiated mechanisms that operate in each direction and to support interventions aimed at parents, coaches, and managers of training programs.

The objective of this review was to analyze the scientific evidence on the influence of the family environment on the development of sport talent among junior tennis players, identifying the factors of parental support and pressure that affect performance, motivation, and continued participation in the sport.

To this end, a documentary review was conducted through a systematized search and thematic synthesis of the scientific literature. The search was carried out in the Scopus, Web of Science, and PubMed databases, considering publications available up to January 2026. The descriptors used were: (family environment OR parental involvement OR parental support OR parental pressure) AND (junior tennis OR youth tennis OR tennis talent) AND (motivation OR performance OR dropout OR burnout). In addition, studies published before 2015 were included when they provided relevant theoretical models or evidence.

The document screening process began with 312 records identified in the main search. A total of 198 records were removed due to duplication, and 103 were excluded because they did not specifically address the relationship between family and athlete in developmental sport contexts, or because they did not focus on variables related to parental support, pressure, motivation, performance, dropout, or talent development in youth tennis. Finally, 11 documents were included in the main body of analysis.

The analysis was conducted through inductive thematic categorization of the units of meaning extracted from the selected documents. Based on this procedure, three axes of analysis were organized: the functions of parental support in talent development; the effects of parental pressure on psychological well-being and performance; and the moderating variables that determine the differential impact of family involvement.

Development

Functions of Parental Support in Sport Talent Development in Youth Tennis

The family environment constitutes a structural condition in the development of sport talent in youth tennis, although its influence should not be understood as an automatic relationship between family support and competitive success. In this sport, the family becomes involved from the earliest stages of participation through emotional support, financial resources, logistical accompaniment, regulation of daily life, and the progressive construction of a sport identity. This understanding is related to Côté's (1999) developmental model of sport participation, which distinguishes between the sampling years, specialization years, and investment years, stages in which the role of the family changes according to the athlete's age, sport commitment, and competitive demands.

In the initial phases, family support is mainly oriented toward facilitating access to the sport, sustaining attendance at training sessions, and promoting a positive experience of participation. During the specialization and investment phases, the family role becomes more complex, because it must accompany the increase in technical, competitive, and emotional demands without replacing the young athlete's progressive autonomy. From this perspective, talent development does not depend solely on the individual qualities of the tennis player, but on the interaction between personal abilities, training opportunities, available resources, and the quality of family accompaniment (Côté, 1999; Henriksen et al., 2010).

Family accompaniment also fulfills an educational function in the development of the junior tennis player. This function is not limited to providing resources or ensuring attendance at training sessions; rather, it involves promoting values associated with sport practice, such as discipline, order, respect, perseverance, autonomy, and responsibility. These values allow the player to face the demands of training and competition as part of a progressive formative process, in which sport development must be articulated with personal and academic maturation.

In the specific context of tennis, Wolfenden and Holt (2005) identified six categories associated with adult influence on the talent development of elite junior tennis players: emotional support, tangible support, informational support, sacrifices, pressure, and relationships with coaches. Their findings show that parents play a particularly relevant role in providing emotional

and tangible support, while the coach is mainly positioned in the domain of technical advice. This differentiation of functions is important because it makes it possible to understand that the family should not assume the technical role of the coach, but rather create conditions of stability, trust, and continuity so that the sport development process can be sustained.

The family role requires a permanent willingness to engage in dialogue with the coach or technical team that supports the player. The family can provide emotional stability, daily organization, and motivational support, but it should avoid replacing the coach's technical decisions. Therefore, selecting coaches with experience in formative processes is important, as is subsequently trusting their pedagogical and sport-related work, while avoiding interference that limits the player's autonomy during training.

The family also appears as a central source of social capital in the sport trajectory of junior tennis players. Novak et al. (2020), in a study with 75 players participating in an ITF junior tournament, found that social capital indicators explained 13.1% of the variance in sport success. In addition, 97.33% of the players stated that their family supported and paid attention to their tennis career. These data show that family support is a highly present dimension in competitive youth tennis, although its effect is mediated by other components of the environment, such as school, the sport team, the coach, and institutional conditions.

Family social capital should not be reduced to economic availability. Although tennis requires resources for training, tournaments, travel, and equipment, the evidence shows that family support also includes trust, guidance, emotional validation, a sense of belonging, and the ability to sustain the athlete during periods of competitive uncertainty. Novak et al. (2024), in studying family ties and social capital among tennis players of different levels, including Grand Slam champions, concluded that the family plays a key role in upbringing, accompaniment, and the accumulation of social capital throughout the sport career. However, these authors caution that the family is a relevant but not sufficient condition for achieving maximum performance, since sport success also depends on technical, psychological, institutional, and contextual factors.

Family support must sustain an integral vision of the development of the junior tennis player. Academic training and sport training should not be understood as opposing dimensions, but as complementary components of the same formative trajectory. The family plays a relevant role when it helps balance training sessions, competitions, studies, rest, and personal life, preventing sport performance from completely absorbing the young athlete's identity.

Positive parental involvement is therefore characterized by a balance between presence and autonomy. Gao et al. (2024), in a systematic review on the role of parents in the motivation of young athletes, identified favorable parental strategies such as positive goals and values, autonomy support, moderate involvement, positive parent-child relationships, and a task-oriented motivational climate. Although this review is not limited to tennis, its findings are relevant because they allow family involvement to be interpreted through well-established motivational theories. In

this sense, parental support favors talent development when it promotes autonomy, competence, and affective bonds, rather than when it turns performance into a condition for family recognition.

Functional parental involvement is also expressed in parents' ability to accompany the competitive experience without invading it. Gould et al. (2006), in a national survey administered to youth tennis coaches in the United States, found that coaches perceived parents as very important actors in the success of young tennis players. However, the same coaches distinguished between positive and negative influence: 59% of parents were perceived as a positive influence and 36% as a negative influence. Positive behaviors included logistical, financial, and socioemotional support, opportunities for practice, and unconditional love; negative behaviors were related to an excessive emphasis on winning, unrealistic expectations, and criticism of the athlete.

These findings make it possible to affirm that the family fulfills a formative function when it sustains the sport process without conditioning the affective bond on the result. The evidence does not question parental participation in youth tennis; rather, it problematizes the form that such participation takes. The family can become a decisive support network when it accompanies, organizes, contains, and validates the young tennis player's effort. Conversely, it can become a risk factor when it interprets the sport career as an investment that must produce immediate results.

Effects of Parental Pressure on Psychological Well-Being, Motivation, and Performance

Parental pressure constitutes one of the most consistent findings in the reviewed literature. This pressure is not limited to demanding victories; it may also manifest as criticism after matches, unsolicited technical instructions, comparison with other players, disproportionate expectations, constant monitoring of performance, or affection conditioned by results. In youth tennis, these forms of pressure acquire particular intensity because the athlete competes individually, is directly exposed to error, and must manage frustration without constant support during play.

Wolfenden and Holt (2005) showed that parents were perceived as a source of pressure when they became excessively involved in competitive settings. This pressure appeared especially when adults exceeded their support role and began to interfere in technical or evaluative decisions that corresponded to the coach or the athlete. Consequently, parental overinvolvement can weaken the tennis player's autonomy and turn competition into a permanent space of family evaluation.

The evidence from Gould et al. (2006) reinforces this interpretation. The coaches surveyed identified excessive emphasis on winning, unrealistic expectations, and criticism of the child as negative parental behaviors. These behaviors are particularly problematic because they shift the formative meaning of sport toward a result-centered logic. When the value of effort becomes subordinated to the score, the young tennis player may develop controlled motivation, oriented more toward avoiding disapproval than toward sustaining enjoyment, technical improvement, and continued participation in the sport.

From the perspective of self-determination theory, this difference between support and control helps explain the opposing effects of the family on motivation. Gao et al. (2024) found that autonomy-supportive parenting is associated with favorable motivational outcomes, whereas pressure, psychological control, and performance-centered expectations are related to amotivation, controlled motivation, and frustration of basic psychological needs. In other words, the problem is not that parents are present, but that their presence becomes surveillance, criticism, or control.

Parental pressure can also affect the athlete's psychological well-being. In youth tennis, competitive anxiety does not arise only from the difficulty of the match or the opponent's level, but also from anticipating the family's reaction to defeat. When the athlete perceives that the result modifies the treatment, recognition, or emotional climate at home, competition ceases to be a learning experience and becomes a threat to personal worth. This dynamic may reduce sport enjoyment and increase the probability of exhaustion, rejection of training, or progressive dropout.

The literature on sport transitions helps explain this relationship with continued participation. Stambulova et al. (2009) argue that transitions within a sport career are critical moments that require contextual support. When athletes are unable to cope adequately with these transitions, negative consequences may emerge, including premature dropout. In youth tennis, transitions between training, specialization, and high-performance stages usually coincide with higher costs, greater competitive demands, ranking pressure, and tensions among school, family, and sport. If the family responds to these demands with excessive control, the transition may become more vulnerable.

However, the relationship between pressure and performance should not be interpreted simplistically. Certain degrees of demand may be perceived as structure, discipline, or commitment, especially when accompanied by emotional support and realistic expectations. The problem arises when demand becomes control, affective conditionality, or constant criticism. Therefore, the review makes it possible to distinguish between formative demand and dysfunctional pressure. The former guides, organizes, and accompanies; the latter invades, conditions, and deteriorates the sport experience.

In this regard, optimal parental involvement does not mean the absence of participation. An indifferent or distant family does not favor talent development either. The critical point lies in the quality of involvement. Moderate, autonomy-supportive, and emotionally stable involvement helps sustain intrinsic motivation and sport continuity. In contrast, excessive, controlling, or result-centered involvement may affect psychological well-being and weaken continued participation in tennis (Gao et al., 2024; Gould et al., 2006; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005).

Moderating Variables of Family Impact

The influence of the family on sport talent does not operate uniformly across all junior tennis players. The evidence allows several moderating variables to be identified: developmental stage, competitive level, gender, the type of relationship among parents, coach, and athlete, and the institutional structure of the sport environment. These variables explain why the same parental behavior may be interpreted as support by one athlete and as pressure by another.

Developmental stage is one of the most relevant variables. Côté (1999) showed that the family modifies its role throughout the sport career, from initial accompaniment during the sampling years to emotional and organizational support during the investment phase. This implies that parental behavior that is appropriate at early ages may become intrusive if it is maintained without adjustment during later adolescence. For example, organizing training sessions and accompanying the athlete to tournaments may be necessary in childhood, but constantly deciding for the athlete during the specialization stages may interfere with autonomy.

Cahill and MacNamara (2025) provide recent evidence by showing that the parental role among high-potential tennis players evolves over time. In their longitudinal qualitative study, parents were identified as providers, interpreters, and role models. These functions varied according to the developmental stage, competitive demands, challenges of the season, and family dynamics. This finding is important because it shows that the family does not fulfill a fixed role, but rather an adaptive one. The quality of its support depends on the ability to read the athlete's changing needs and adjust the forms of accompaniment.

Competitive level also moderates family influence. In players who progress toward national or international circuits, family support tends to acquire greater logistical and emotional complexity. Novak et al. (2020) showed that family and sport-team social capital were related to performance, although differently according to gender. Among female players, family and sport social capital showed a more favorable association with competitive success. This result indicates that the family may be especially relevant for certain athlete profiles, but also that its influence depends on interaction with other domains, such as the team, school, and support networks.

Gender introduces another dimension that must be considered with caution. The available evidence does not allow universal conclusions to be established, but it does suggest that male and female players may experience support, pressure, and family expectations differently. Novak et al. (2020) found differences in the relationship between social capital and performance according to the players' sex. This evidence invites researchers and practitioners to avoid generalizations and to recognize that the family experience of tennis may be shaped by differentiated expectations, distinct forms of accompaniment, and specific sociocultural conditions.

The relationship among parents, coaches, and athletes constitutes another decisive variable. In youth tennis, talent development does not depend solely on the family or the coach separately, but on the quality of the interaction between both. Ntalachani et al. (2025), from a phenomenological perspective of the coach-athlete-parent relationship, found that parental

involvement fluctuates between support and pressure, and that the construction of trust between parents and coaches significantly influences young athletes' sport experience. Although this study was not conducted in tennis, its findings are useful for understanding the triangular dynamic that also characterizes developmental sport.

Communication constitutes the operational axis of this triangular relationship. In youth tennis, communication must function clearly between parents and players, parents and coaches, and coaches and players. When these three communicative links remain coherent, the athlete receives consistent guidance regarding goals, responsibilities, and areas for improvement. Conversely, weak or contradictory communication can generate confusion, additional pressure, and tensions among technical guidance, family expectations, and the player's subjective experience.

In tennis, this triangular relationship is especially important because parents are often present at training sessions, tournaments, travel, and planning decisions. If there is no clear communication between coach and family, the messages received by the athlete may become contradictory. Harwood and Porter (2026), in a 30-week intervention based on the 5Cs framework within a British youth tennis talent development environment, showed that psychosocial work was more effective when it was adapted to tennis, to the individual needs of the player, and to collaboration among parents, coaches, and athletes. This study demonstrates that the psychosocial development of the tennis player improves when the actors within the environment share language, criteria, and responsibilities.

Within this framework, the family should promote spaces in which the player can train, decide, and progressively face sport responsibilities. Parental presence should not translate into constant surveillance or permanent intervention during training, but into accompaniment that allows the athlete to build independence, confidence, and self-regulation skills.

Henriksen et al.'s (2010) ecological approach makes it possible to integrate these findings into a broader understanding. According to this approach, talent development should not focus exclusively on the individual athlete, but on the development environment that surrounds the athlete. In the case of youth tennis, this environment includes family, coach, peers, sport institution, school, competitive calendar, and available resources. Therefore, the family environment is a fundamental dimension, but its effect depends on how it is articulated with the other conditions of the system.

The importance of the environment has also been highlighted in general studies on sport talent development. Alarfaj et al. (2024) show that talent development is not explained only by internal factors of the athlete, but also by environmental conditions related to support, opportunities, family context, resources, and educational trajectories. Although their study does not focus on youth tennis, it is useful as contextual support to reinforce the idea that sport talent is

constructed in interaction with external conditions and not as the exclusive result of personal attributes.

The institutional structure of tennis also influences the way families accompany the sport development process. Pill et al. (2023), in analyzing barriers and supports for women tennis coaches in Australia, show that the organizational context of tennis presents tensions related to job stability, institutional support, professional development, and work-family balance. Although this study does not directly examine the family-junior tennis player relationship, it suggests that talent development occurs within sport systems where the availability, quality, and stability of coaching staff also shape the experience of players and families.

From this perspective, the family may either amplify or reduce the tensions inherent to youth tennis. It may amplify them when it increases pressure for results, invades the technical role of the coach, or conditions affection on performance. It may reduce them when it offers emotional security, helps organize daily demands, respects the athlete's progressive autonomy, and maintains constructive communication with the coach. This difference makes it possible to understand why the same family presence may operate either as a resource or as a risk.

Conclusion

The family environment influences the development of sport talent among junior tennis players through the resources it provides and through the way it regulates the emotional, motivational, and competitive climate surrounding the athlete. The family can promote performance, motivation, and continued participation when it accompanies the process with appropriate support, affective stability, respect for autonomy, and coordination with the coach. Conversely, it can weaken the sport trajectory when its involvement is expressed through pressure for results, criticism, excessive control, or expectations that the young tennis player perceives as imposition.

Research makes it possible to understand that the most appropriate parental support is not the most intense or the most visible, but the support that adapts to the athlete's developmental stage, competitive level, and psychological needs. Family accompaniment should also be understood as an educational and communicative task, aimed at articulating personal values, academic development, sport development, and respectful coordination with the coach. Therefore, talent development in youth tennis requires a family capable of sustaining the process without taking ownership of it, demanding effort without conditioning affection, and accompanying competition without turning the result into a measure of the player's personal worth.

References

- Alarfaj, A. A., Hassan, M. M., Aljohar, R. M., Almuaili, F. A., & Hassan, M. D. (2024). The internal and external factors influencing talent development of athletic talent among Saudi Arabia's twice exceptional elite athletes: A comprehensive study. *PLOS ONE*, 19(12), e0304049. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0304049>
- Cahill, G., & MacNamara, A. (2025). Beyond the Courts: A Qualitative Exploration of the Evolving Role of Parents in Supporting High-Potential Tennis Players. *The Sport Psychologist*, 39(3), 163–175. <https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2024-0159>
- Côté, J. (1999). The Influence of the Family in the Development of Talent in Sport. *The Sport Psychologist*, 13(4), 395–417. <https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.13.4.395>
- Gao, Z., Chee, C. S., Norjali Wazir, M. R. W., Wang, J., Zheng, X., & Wang, T. (2024). The role of parents in the motivation of young athletes: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1291711. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1291711>
- Gould, D., Lauer, L., Rolo, C., Jannes, C., & Pennisi, N. (2006). Understanding the role parents play in tennis success: A national survey of junior tennis coaches. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 40(7), 632–636. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsm.2005.024927>
- Harwood, C., & Porter, K. (2026). Applying the 5Cs Framework to Elite Youth Tennis: Impact Factors in a Talent Development Environment. *Behavioral Sciences*, 16(2), 166. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs16020166>
- Henriksen, K., Stambulova, N., & Roessler, K. K. (2010). Holistic approach to athletic talent development environments: A successful sailing milieu. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 11(3), 212–222. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2009.10.005>
- Novak, D., Oršolić, M., Barbaros, P., Suzuki, E., & Subramanian, S. V. (2025). Family ties and social capital among grand slam tennis champions. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 60(5), 900–920. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902241298498>
- Novak, D., Svalina, F., & Delale, E. A. (2020). Connection between Social Capital and Sport Success of Young Tennis Players. *Social Sciences*, 9(11), 206. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9110206>
- Ntalachani, K., Dania, A., Karteroliotis, K., & Stavrou, N. (2025). Parental Involvement in Youth Sports: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Coach–Athlete–Parent Relationship. *Youth*, 5(3), 81. <https://doi.org/10.3390/youth5030081>

- Pill, S., Petersen, J., Agnew, D., Prichard, I., & Ridley, K. (2024). Barriers, supports and constraints on women coaching in tennis. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 19(1), 33–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541231191596>
- Stambulova, N., Alfermann, D., Statler, T., & Côté, J. (2009). ISSP Position stand: Career development and transitions of athletes. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 7(4), 395–412. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2009.9671916>
- Wolfenden, L. E., & Holt, N. L. (2005). Talent Development in Elite Junior Tennis: Perceptions of Players, Parents, and Coaches. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 17(2), 108–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200590932416>