

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF THE CAPTAIN IN JUNIOR TEAM COMPETITIONS

It is widely recognised that in Junior Team Competitions the role of the Captain is of fundamental importance both for the success of the team & for the development of each junior player part of the team.

Junior team competitions are a unique opportunity to guide and coach closely the junior players when competing. The presence of the captain of the team on court during the match and off court during the entire team event is quite unique one in an individual sport like tennis.

In order to relate well to their junior players as well as get the maximum out of his/her junior team a captain might wish to consider the following guidelines:

- **To listen and try to understand all team members, guiding and coaching them accordingly**
- **Be aware of the extra pressure on the junior players given by the responsibility of representing their club/county/region/country**
- **Be aware of junior player's family and club training back-ground**
- **The method of communication and coaching style needs to adapt to different junior players and situations. The best captains are then those that coach all team members with an individual coaching style**
- **The captain's responsibility is to decide (sometimes in consultation with the coaches of his/her players) on what the junior players should practice each day and plan the training so that the team will be ready on the day of the competition**
- **The captain will also search for appropriate times to communicate with the group, to hold individual or team talks**
- **Preparatory training for junior team competitions should complement each individual junior player's training programme. A balance must be therefore reached between the team's objectives and goals of the player's individualised training plan.**
- **If members of the junior players' team attend the competition the captain should consult them with respect to planning the training sessions and also collaborate with the players' private tennis coaches during on court work**
- **In a team environment all junior players should be given concrete tasks both in and off court**
- **Specific tactical plans should then be developed for each match as good captains are thorough in their analysis of the game plans of their junior players and prospective opponents**

General characteristics of good captains both on and off court are:

- **Credit and congratulate his/her junior players for their efforts and work on court daily;**
- **Calm, controlled and consisted behaviour is essential for good communication and coaching**
- **Display appropriate body language that reinforces the captain's message and is adapted to each junior player**

- **An eye for detail, coaching that is directed toward the specific needs of the junior player and the competition**
- **Organise off court activities for junior players to enjoy and relax**
- **To choose which junior players will play singles and/or doubles and manage positively any related disappointment**
- **To choose the composition of the team (ie. fitness coach) not only based on professional competency but also based on the ability to complement or add to the team spirit.**
- **Manage any situation related to parents, organisers, officials, press, supporters and sponsors**
- **Follow his/her junior players results in tournaments ahead of the team competition and congratulate/encourage players (even via email or telephone) for good performance or poor results respectively.**

Based on the above the ITF Junior Tennis Task Force believe that the role of the Captain at junior team event is a positive and important opportunity for junior player development.