



What Makes Winners

A study by experts from the International Tennis Federation and Valencia University in Spain has found that the countries offering the most men's professional tournaments tend to produce the best men's professional players.

The study will be published shortly in a special tennis issue of the scientific journal of Sports Medicine Australia (SMA), the *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*.

It explains that the Grand Slams are on the top rung of the men's professional tournament structure.

Below the Slams are the more than 80 tournaments on the ATP tour in close to 40 countries, organised in different categories which reflect the prize money and ranking points offered. The more significant these tournaments are in terms of prize money and ranking points, the higher the ranking needs to be of the player entering them.

The ATP events are followed by the Satellite and Future events organised by the ITF. A Satellite circuit involves 4 weeks of tournaments, with the 24 best-performed players from the first three tournaments qualifying for the fourth tournament (The Masters). Only these 24 players receive world-ranking points.

The ITF Futures are lower entry-level events that last for one week. The prize money available ranges from \$US15,000 to \$US25,000 and ranking points can be earned by all competitors.

Both kinds of events have increased recently, affording many more players opportunities to compete. They represent the first level of opportunity for professional players to acquire computer ranking points and successful performance facilitates a player's movement up the competitive ladder.

The US, Spain and Italy – the 3 countries with the most tournaments (more than 40 a year) – are in the top 5 nations in terms of players with ATP ranking points.

Among countries with between 20 and 40 tournaments, Germany and France had the 3rd and 4th highest number of ATP-ranked players. Britain – with 21 events – was only the 14th highest. The paper cites research suggesting that lack of infrastructure in Britain, poor climate and “attitudinal” factors account for this.

Of the countries with between 11 and 20 events, Australia, Brazil, Switzerland and Argentina have a high number of ATP-ranked players, reflecting a healthy tournament structure.

“The provision of professional tournament opportunities is particularly important for countries such as Australia and to a lesser extent Brazil and Argentina, due to their great expanse and relative geographic isolation. In doing so, these nations provide a clear pathway for players to enter the professional game without a high cost that may preclude some players from pursuing a tennis career,” the paper says.

Among the countries with between 6 and 10 tournaments, Austria, The Netherlands and Czech Republic are in the top 10 in at least one category of ATP-ranked players. The paper notes that, though they have few professional events, their geographical position affords their players opportunities to earn ranking points in Europe.

Sweden and Russia are exceptions. Though they have only 5 or fewer tournaments, they rate well in terms of ATP-ranked players.

“The lack of professional events in these two nations may be related to their inclement climates...Nonetheless, it does demand that both Swedish and Russian players travel abroad in the pursuit of professional tournaments...this willingness to travel and play and train abroad may be a factor in the success currently experienced by Russian players at the top of the men’s game.”

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Professional tournament structure and nations' success in men's professional tennis

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Abstract

The relationship between a nation's men's professional tennis tournament structure and that nation's success in the international men's game is discussed. The 2002 men's professional tennis tournament calendar provided the distribution of events for 30 countries. Criteria used to classify a nation's success in men's professional tennis were: number of players with ATP points, number of players with a top 200 ranking, and the combined ATP ranking of a nation's top 5 male players. Pearson correlations were performed between the number of tournaments and the three criteria. Results revealed considerable variation in the number of events organised: between 67 (USA) and 4 (Sweden). Twenty-nine of the 30 countries had internationally ranked male players and 22 countries had players ranked inside the top 200. It was shown that nations' with a high number of men's professional events are best positioned to produce more professionally ranked players (0.74). However, a high number of tournaments is not related to the production of elite players (-0.59). It can be concluded that competition is an important factor in player development and that countries that provide more professional competitive opportunities can experience more success at the professional level.