

You Can't be Serious, that Ball was IN: An Investigation of Junior Tennis Cheating Behavior

Jonathan Casper

North Carolina State University, Raleigh, North Carolina

Because junior tennis players have to enforce the rules of the game against each other, cheating to give a player an unfair advantage is common. While this deviant behavior is found to be commonplace in the sport, there is little research to investigate its cause or influences. Results indicated that junior players felt that personal and parental pressures were the most common sources of perceived pressure to win that resulted in cheating behavior. The prevalence of parents who cheat was also cited as a major issue with the participants. Implications as to how the current study adds to the literature of youth cheating as well as practical implications are discussed. Key Words: Cheating, Tennis, Moral Development, and Youth Sport

Unlike many sports where there is a referee or a judge overseeing play, a youth tennis match has neither. Instead, the game relies on a system of ethics known as the code that sets the norm for player's behavior and enforces the rules of play (United States Tennis Association, 2005). Once each player takes the court it is up to both competitors to enforce the rules of the game and abide by the code. This unique situation serves as an opportunity to examine sportsmanship, in particular cheating.

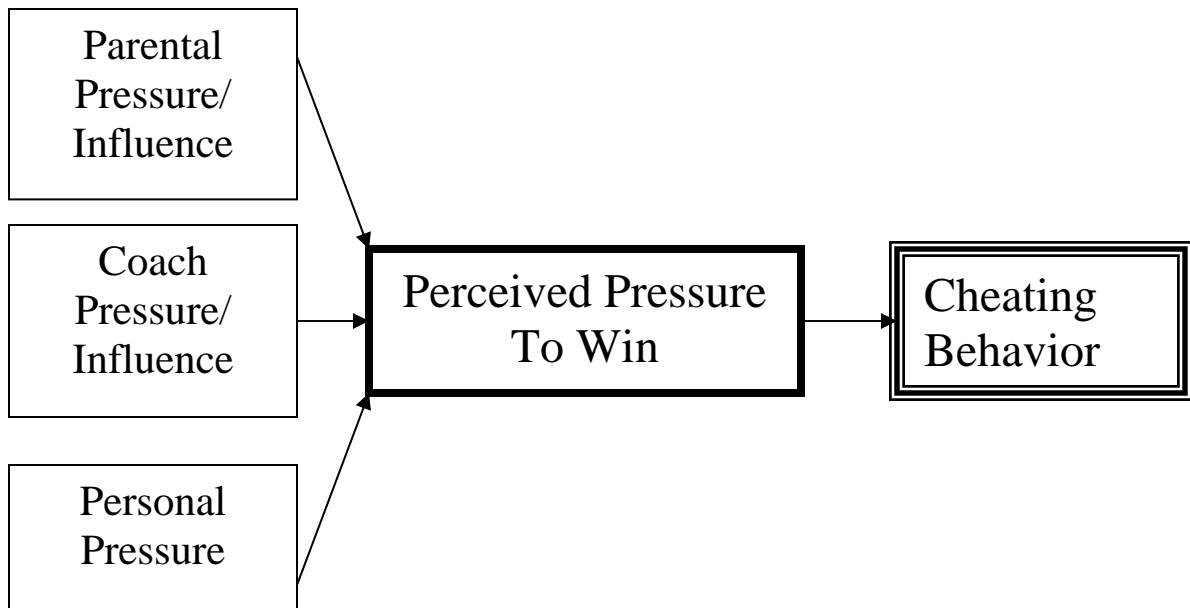
Cheating is defined as "an offense against the principles of justice as well as against a particular rule or norm of behavior" (McIntosh, 1977, p. 185). This behavior goes beyond sport. Many people cheat in relationships, in their jobs, on their diets, on their taxes, and in school. In sport, cheating has become so common or normal that it is often looked at as expected or intrinsic to the sport itself. According to Stanley Eitzen (2001), "getting such a competitive edge unfairly is viewed by many in these sports as 'strategy' rather than cheating...illegal acts are accepted as part of the game." For example, in basketball, it is considered normal to pretend to be fouled in order to receive a free throw and give the opponent an undeserved foul. Football players are coached to use illegal techniques to hold players without detection by a referee. Home teams have been known to make their facility as opponent unfriendly as possible. With most sports, the culture is to get a competitive advantage over the opponent even if it means taking an unfair advantage. Winning is more important than being fair (Eitzen).

Cheating in youth tennis is a prominent issue. There are many opportunities to make a bad call or call the score in one's favor without an outside spectator being able to overrule because the players make the line calls and report the score themselves. When faced with a game or match point a player can call a ball out that was obviously in. The opponent can question the call, argue, and disagree, but the call will stand under the rules of play. The opponent is rendered helpless against cheating due to the rules and the lack of an official. If an opponent feels like he/she is being cheated against, he/she can go to

the tournament desk and ask for a referee to watch the match. In the presence of a referee, the opponent will not make any more bad calls or call the wrong score, but often times it is too late and the momentum of the match will have changed over one bad call.

While it is common knowledge that cheating exists in junior tennis, there has been little research to date. The author of this article was a competitive junior tennis player and a teaching professional/coach for over 14 years. Based on his experience in tennis, with respect to the prevalence of cheating, it is hypothesized by the author that cheating in junior tennis is a result of three influences: coach, parental, and personal (see Figure 1). This study focuses on these three influences (personal, parental, and coaching) to provide a further understanding of how they are viewed by junior tennis players. This manuscript represents a review of the literature of some of the external pressures junior tennis players may experience that promote cheating. A number of tennis players have been interviewed in order to get their personal perspectives on these factors. Findings from this study may provide insight to those associated with junior tennis; as to the extent and cause of cheating in the game.

Figure 1. Hypothesized representation for why players exhibit cheating behavior.



Literature Review

In the following section of the manuscript, the literature regarding the hypothesized external pressures (coach, parental, and personal) junior tennis players experience that leads to cheating behavior are reviewed separately.

Coach Pressure

It has been hypothesized that moral functioning in terms of sportsmanship can be emphasized by the coach. Specifically, cheating in sport has been attributed to the pressure to win from a coach. For example, Shields, Bredemeier, Gardner, and Bostrom

(1995) researched cheating and aggression in context with relation to leadership, cohesion, and team norms in collegiate baseball and softball players. Their results indicated that age, year in school, and years of playing experience all related positively with expectations of peer cheating, aggression, and the belief that the coach would sanction cheating if necessary to win. Further, female athletes who had a female coach were less likely to cheat, and the coach was less likely to sanction cheating than female athletes who had a male coach. The authors concluded that the sanctioning of cheating by a coach may be due to the “moral atmosphere” characterizing the sport setting. There is more of an emphasis on winning than moral action.

A moral atmosphere that is conducive to cheating by a coach may signify to their players that cheating is acceptable. For example, Stuart (2003) conducted qualitative research of competitive youth participants in multiple sports in relation to moral issues. Stuart’s study found that the fairness of action by the coach had a negative impact in the youths’ behavior. In particular, it was found that there was a correlation between coaches who allowed cheating to take place in practice and cheating behavior shown by the youth players during real games. Coaches’ behavior in practice was also related to aggression (coaches reinforcing or not condoning aggression). Lastly, coaches were found to contribute to a negative moral atmosphere by arguing and fighting with officials during competition.

In a related study, Miller (2004) examined cheating in youth soccer (European football) players. The findings indicated that players’ sportsmanship was closely related to the performance climate that was reinforced by the coach. Specifically, coaches who focused on a performance oriented climate (winning is the most important thing) versus a mastery climate (focus on improving skill level) predicted cheating behavior in the participants. Findings indicated that constant exposure to coaching that emphasized winning motivated a player to cheat. In particular, a performance-oriented climate by the coach predicted low moral judgment, an intention to cheat, and actual self-reported cheating.

Parental Pressure

It has been well documented that parental pressure contributes to burnout or dropout in junior tennis (Gould, Tuffy, Udry, & Loehr, 1996a, 1996b, 1997), but there has not been a link to cheating. The pressures that parents put on a talented junior tennis player start at a very young age. According to Robert Giltinan, a junior coach for the Australian National Tennis Association,

The parents are putting a lot of pressure on them (junior players) from a much younger age now because of all the money in the game. I think every match they play is really important and a lot of the time they are not playing for themselves, they’re playing for their parents. (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001)

Giltinan states that the pressures put on the players are pushing them to desperate measures. When asked about cheating in tennis when there is no line judge present Giltinan stated:

The link comes mainly from the parents. Generally ten-year old kids don't go out there to cheat, they go out to play the sport and have fun like they all do and they're not out there to try to cheat. It's just that they get pressures from home. I've heard a woman say in the back of a tennis court, "Everything that's close to the line, you make sure you call it out." And that was her own daughter. (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001)

Giltinan interviewed a tennis mom who admitted that pressure from parents might be a reason that a player makes bad line calls. According to the parent, "It's pretty easy to say the wrong thing to your son at the wrong time and put a bit of pressure on him. You don't really think you're doing it at the time" (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001). The cheating behavior might also come from the threat of physical abuse from the parent, according to Pat Cash, a former professional player who is now a junior coach.

I've seen it. I've seen parents just walk up behind them and give them a decent whack on the ear for losing. I was at Gosford for nationals about three weeks ago and there was a kid much younger than all the rest. He lost the match and his father took him away from the tennis center and one of the women who was working there was driving past and they saw the father punch the son in the chest just for losing the match. (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2001)

Personal Pressure

Personal expectations for performance and the stress associated with competition may contribute toward cheating. With respect to personal pressure, the player looks at cheating as a way to win and excel in the sport. For them to make it to the highest level they will do whatever it takes. If they have to cheat, they will do it. The possible threat of a loss can cause a tremendous amount of stress on the player. In one of the few studies investigating norm breaking behavior in junior tennis, Hanegby and Tenenbaum (2001) found that cheating behaviors in young skilled tennis players seem to result from stress, as they perceive the matches to be of critical importance to their career. They also found that cheating behavior was more common in close or tie situations.

The behaviors investigated are not only directly linked to the pressures that are put on a junior player by parents or coaches, but a result of it. It may be evident that all three factors (personal, parental, and coach) can have an effect in causing youth tennis players to cheat. One factor can be more salient than another. For example, a parent may not put a lot of pressure on the junior, but a coach might expect too much from the player. The opposite may be true; the parental expectations far outweigh the coaches' or player's expectations. While it is common knowledge that cheating exists in junior tennis, there has been little research to date. Prior research has helped to understand the causes and prevalence of cheating in youth tennis (e.g., Hanegby & Tenenbaum, 2001), but there has been no qualitative research that has examined this specific behavior from the youth perspective. Also, continued research on cheating, such as the current study, may provide insight into the behavior to help create practical strategies to curb the prevalence of

cheating behavior in the sport. This study focuses on three hypothesized influences of cheating in junior tennis (see Figure 1) to understand the extent of cheating and to see if one of these influences is more prevalent or influential than the other as described by junior tennis players.

Methodology

Theoretical Perspectives

This study was grounded in social constructivism. The interest of social constructivism is to discover the ways social reality and social phenomena are constructed. Social constructivism contends that categories of knowledge and reality are actively created by social relationships and interactions (Crotty, 1998). There is an emphasis on the importance of culture in the context of understanding what occurs in society and construction of knowledge based on this understanding (Derry, 1999; Kim, 2001; McMahan, 1997). There are three main premises that underlie social constructivism: reality, knowledge, and learning. Reality does not exist prior to its social intervention. Members of society invent the properties of the world and reality is constructed through human activity (Kim; Kukla, 2000). In terms of knowledge, individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment in which they live. Lastly, learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities. Learning neither takes place only within an individual, nor as a passive development of behaviors that are shaped by external forces (McMahan). The data gathered from this study was a collection of participants' perceptions of cheating behaviors and the consequences and the severity of cheating, depending upon how each individual constructed his understanding of the behavior. It is assumed that cheating is a learned behavior that is constructed through social interactions.

Participants

The participants in this study were four junior (ages 14 to 17) tennis players who played at a highly competitive (tournament) level. The guidelines and the approval of the Human Subjects Review board at the researcher's university were followed for recruiting participants. As their primary sport participants had chosen tennis and practiced at least four times per week. It was hoped that by recruiting highly involved tennis participants, they would have experienced cheating more often than an infrequent participant. All the participants achieved an individual state ranking prior to the study. The four participants in this study were the only tennis players in the surrounding regional area who met the above criteria. A local tennis professional helped the researcher make initial contact with the eligible participants. The researcher had no prior contact with the participants. There were no female players in the region who had extensive competitive tennis experience above the high school level. Permission to interview the participants, who are minors, was obtained from the parents or guardians and the participants themselves. All four participants agreed to meet for the interview at a predetermined date and time.

Jeff

Jeff was 14 years old and had been playing competitive tennis for 5 years. He was a freshman in high school and played the number two singles position for his high school team. Individually, Jeff was ranked number eight in the region and ranked in the top 150 in the nation. He had a private tennis coach and did not participate in any group lessons. He was committed to playing college tennis and getting an athletic scholarship.

Tim

Tim was the best tennis player of the group. Tim was 16 years old and had been playing competitive tennis for “as long as I can remember,” actually 9 years. He was a junior in high school and played number one singles for his team. Last year he placed third in the state championships. Individually, Tim was ranked number one in the region, in the 16 and under age category, and top 25 in the nation. He was already being recruited by many Division I athletic programs because of his ranking. He hoped not only to play for a collegiate team, but “help them win a national championship.” In 2001, he received the sportsmanship award given by the state tennis association and was given the opportunity to be a ball-boy for the U.S. Open.

Bob

Bob was 18 years old and a senior in high school. He played number one singles for his team and finished sixth at the state championships. He had been playing tennis competitively for 5 years and had achieved an individual regional ranking of 14. He hoped to play college tennis at the Air Force Academy if admitted.

Mark

Mark was 16 years old and had been playing competitive tennis for the past 2 years. He played number one doubles for his high school tennis team. He had achieved a state ranking in the top 20, but had not played in any regional tournaments. He had no goal of playing tennis in college, but wanted to play for fun.

Data Collection Methods

This study followed a basic qualitative focus group design. Morgan (1993) has suggested focus groups when the idea is to explore complex behavior (e.g., morals). Focus groups also allow the researcher to elicit open-ended comments, and help participants feel comfortable in an environment that is permissive and non-judgmental. Lastly, focus groups can offer an appropriate medium for work at various steps of the research process, from hypothesis generation to hypothesis testing (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The focus group in the current study included four male participants. The focus group (Morgan) was used to gather data using semi-structured questions to pursue information based on the hypothesized representation of cheating behavior in youth tennis (see Figure 1). This method was implemented because it could generate greater

depth into the subject, and it could make the participants feel more comfortable and be more honest about the subject of cheating in the presence of others. In addition, the power differentials between the adolescents and researcher could be reduced by the group format, which provides peer support and much less of a focus on any one individual. The interview consisted of participant introductions, orienting comments, questions relating to cheating in general in tennis, and questions relating to the influences that underlie cheating behavior. Interview questions were formed based on the researcher's prior experience as a tennis player and coach as well as a pilot study conducted by the researcher that used observation and questionnaire research to investigate cheating (Casper, 2001). The questions were phrased so that the participants could talk about what they have seen based on their tennis experience. Questions were asked in a general case in order not to embarrass or put the four participants in an awkward personal position. Interview questions relating to cheating included:

1. During the experiences at tournaments have you ever had problems with your opponents making incorrect line calls intentionally or purposely called the score in their favor?
2. Can you tell me about some of the matches where this has happened?
3. Do you think that this is a major problem in junior tennis right now?
4. Why do you think that some of your opponents are purposely cheating?
5. Why do they cheat to win?
6. Do you think that players put so much pressure on themselves that they feel like if they are going to lose they will cheat?
7. How much pressure do you think that parents are putting on players to win? Why?
8. How much pressure do you think that coaches are putting on players to win? Why?
9. Do you think that some players will do whatever it takes to win to make their parents happy? Coaches? To not lose to a player ranked lower than them? To not lose to somebody that they do not like?

While the questions were semi-structured, participants were allowed to elaborate (and deviate) from the questions.

Procedures and Analysis

After receiving permission to conduct the study from the Human Subject Review Board at the University of Northern Colorado, the participants' families were contacted at their home two weeks prior to the interview to request their child's participation. After each parent and child had agreed to participate, a time was established for the focus group interview. An informed consent form was sent home with the parents, and the completed form was required to be signed by the parents and participant before the time of the interview. The participants met at a local tennis club in an empty public room conducive to candid and uninterrupted conversations. The 45-minute interview was audio- and video-recorded and later transcribed. Once transcribed, the cut and paste method (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990) was used to analyze the transcript. With this technique, the

researcher determined which segments of the transcript were important based on the literature review and the model shown in Figure 1. The quotes from the transcripts were then “cut and copied” on to separate documents, its content was based on the hypothesized relationship model. Redundant quotes were prioritized so that the quotes that brought out the most insight into the purpose of the study were included in the results. Remaining quotes from the transcript were then further analyzed to establish categories that were not inclusive to the model. One other category that emerged from the data was the stigma of how a player is viewed by other players if they are known to cheat. Each statement was then coded into the following categories: examples of cheating, the extent of cheating, personal pressure, parental pressure, coach pressure, and the stigma of a cheater.

Trustworthiness

Efforts were made to establish a developmentally appropriate interview guide through the use of the pilot study and consultation with an experienced qualitative researcher. The interview guide was reviewed by a qualitative research specialist for content, to the extent that the interview questions were appropriate and would elicit discussion/response in relation to the hypothesized relationship model. The coded copy of the transcribed interview was again reviewed by the qualitative research specialist and doctoral students, participating in a qualitative research class, to verify proper categorization because the cut and paste technique relies heavily on the judgment of a single analyst (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). One threat to this study’s validity is researcher bias since the researcher has been vested in the sport for many years as a player and coach. To combat this threat, the researcher did not personally know the participants until the time of the interview and had no influence on the participants’ future participation and development in the sport.

Findings

The findings are presented based on the order of the interview questions, with further subsections added based on elaboration and subtopics that emerged throughout the interview process and later coded into categories. The coded categories will be presented in the following order: examples of cheating, the extent of cheating, personal pressure, parental pressure, coach pressure, and the stigma of a cheater.

Examples of Cheating

Each participant was asked to give an example of a time when he felt his opponent cheated.

I was playing down in the Copper Bowl in Arizona and I had just lost my last match. I was so ready to win a match and play well. I was playing this guy who spoke very fluent Spanish I guess (laughing) and he was calling the worst line calls I’ve ever seen...I went to get a referee and he obviously did not know any Spanish and he (the opponent) was calling me

every single name in Spanish that he could think of and the ref did nothing. The ref stayed for awhile, but there were two refs and like thirty courts so as soon as he left, the dude started hooking again. The ref came back and I got the match to 4-5 in the second. The ref left again and on match point the guy called a ball out that was like a foot in. It was so frustrating... I ended up losing the match. – Jeff

I was playing this kid (says name) in the finals...and we had played each other a lot. I was up, won the first 6-4 and 4-2 in the second 30-love. I hit a passing shot that was this far in and he just stood there and said 'out.' I mean he was one of my friends...I stayed over at his house a lot. I said 'there is no way you can do that, you are supposed to be a good friend.' It kinda crossed the line on both feet. It turned into a yelling match. That shook me a lot. I tried to keep going but I kind of cooled off and not let it bother me for the rest of the match...It was so blatant...I ended up losing in three. – Tim

I've never had it change the match, but I've had it disrupt the match. In one of my first tournaments, I was playing a kid...I hit a ball in a close match and I hit a ball that was probably four inches in and I was in good position to see the ball and he called it out. I questioned it and he flipped out. I let him stick with it but it disrupted the match...I ended up winning but it was not fun...it kinda spoiled it. – Bob

Last summer I was playing a match and it was a close match like 5-6 in a third set tiebreaker. I served an ace and he just called it out. It was like the third or fourth time it had happened. I was so upset I ended up double faulting to lose the match. –Mark

While each of the participants had a good story of a time when he felt cheated against, the reason that the opponent cheated was never mentioned. All of the stories were of a time when the match was close, which supports the research by Hanegby and Tenenbaum (2001) who found cheating behavior to be more prominent during tie or close situations.

Is cheating problematic?

While the participants all have had a problem with cheating, they were split on how severe a problem it really is in tennis.

I don't think that it is a big problem...there will always be special cases like a guy in football who clotheslines people. When you're competing, it is more of a competitive thing...you know, I call the lines tight because I am not going to give someone a ball that I think is out. I think cheating is what people perceive it to be. It can be perceived as cheating or it can be seen as competitiveness. I don't think it is a huge problem. – Tim

I don't think that they go out there and plan on purposely cheating...you get those kids that want to win so bad that they will make a call just so that they can win. No one is going out there and saying 'I'm going to cheat this kid on this point' or anything...I...I don't think there is a big problem with it. – Bob

It appears from the group responses that while cheating is common, it has almost become intrinsic to competitive tennis. The players expect that when a match is close, their opponent is more likely to cheat. All participants explained that they have learned to accept it and try not to let it affect their play. Code of conduct, especially throwing and hitting racquets, was frequently mentioned during the interview and cited as a major problem.

Personal Pressure

The participants all felt personal pressure contributed to cheating behavior. This pressure was all put in a competitive context where the pressure to win the match or more likely the threat of losing elicited a cheating behavior.

The biggest pressure I feel is from the ranking part. When I am hanging out at a tournament the thing that we talk about the most is rankings. The higher we are ranked, the more out-of-state tournaments we can play. – Jeff

I was ranked eight and I was beating a player ranked three. The entire match he was yelling and screaming and doing all that stuff and I bet if I was ranked higher than him he wouldn't have been doing anything. I put a lot of pressure on myself because my parents are teachers and don't have a whole lot of money, so I put pressure on myself to win...There is that pressure of 'I've got to beat him' so the elements of cheating can possibly come into play. – Bob

I think intensity plays a big part in cheating. I know when Tim and I are practicing it can get pretty intense. There is a close call here and there and it can get pretty ugly. Even though we are just practicing we both want to win and we will do whatever it takes. We still walk off the court as friends though. - Mark

I think if given the opportunity, a lower ranked player will cheat if the opportunity arrives. If a player calls the score 4-5 and it is really 5-4 most players will just let it go and not correct the score. They will play it in their favor. – Tim

Parental Pressure

By far the most common reason that the participants sighted for cheating was due to parental pressure. The author, as a former junior player, felt that there was a natural element of pressure from parents because there is a large monetary investment in competitive junior tennis. During the interview, I never mentioned parental pressure, but the juniors cited this type of pressure consistently throughout the interview. “I could list off ten players who just deviously cheat and every single one of their parents are just nuts.” - Tim

Parents want kids to do their best and they want the best for their kids but at the same time, they are pushing it so hard for their kids to do their best that they start expressing their emotions and it starts putting pressure on their kids. – Bob

“I saw a mom chewing her son out in the parking lot, saying that she was never going to take him back to this tournament again.” – Jeff

I was playing in the Fiesta Bowl in December and there were these two parents fighting over a line call that one of the players made. They just kept on fighting and I swear that they were going to come to blows...one of the dads threatened the other and said he was an FBI agent and he should look out. – Tim

I was playing one time and my parents were sitting near my opponent and my parents heard the other player’s parent say “this kid sucks, how can he be losing to this kid” they did not even give credit to me for playing well. I think that parents will make excuses for times when their kid is not playing well. They put a ton of money into lessons and if they are not winning they always have an excuse. – Bob

A player might also learn cheating from a parent who cheats. For example, Walker, Henning, and Krettenauer (2000) found that interactions with parents serve as a predictor of moral reasoning as a child or adolescent develops. In other words, they will model their parents’ behavior. The participants in this study brought up an aspect of cheating not hypothesized by the author. Not only are the players cheating, the parents help them cheat or even cheat themselves.

Another thing with cheating is a parent using hand signals and coaching their son on the sidelines. I’ve seen so much of that kind of stuff, putting pressure on their sons and half the time the parents can’t even play tennis themselves. – Jeff

One time I was playing and this kid’s mom gets up and slips a note between the fence (the kid starts reading it). I saw the whole thing and I

looked over to my mom and said, “Are you seeing this mom?” I told my mom to go get Bill (the referee) and the kid said, “You can’t have your mom get the ref.” I just stood there and laughed and said, “Well what in the hell do you think your mom is doing then”...it was ridiculous. – Tim

One time a mom came up behind the fence and told her son out loud “just hit it to his backhand, it’s just horrible, he can’t even get it in.” I was shocked so I told her that she was not allowed to coach. She said, “I can’t? Well I’ve been doing it for two years.” – Bob

There’s this one player’s (says the name) dad who got in a fistfight with his son’s coach in Winterville. The coach kicked the player off the court because he was throwing his racquet and being a jerk. The dad ended up getting in a fight with the coach because he wanted his son to keep playing and they just went to blows...it was hilarious...that dad is the worst. Every match he has hand-signals that he gives to his son during the match. – Jeff

I was playing in the final of a Boulder tournament against this kid...I hate the guy. I called a ball out and it was easily out. Instead of questioning me about the call, the kid looked up to his mom, flipped out, and asked if the ball was out. I was like, “what are you doing, you are asking your mom?” And she said, “Yea that ball was in.” I couldn’t believe it and every time we changed sides, his mom would just glare at me. I had to turn my back just so I wouldn’t have to look at her... Parents can be vicious even to an opposing player, they will glare and be mean...it can be bad sometimes. – Bob

There was this mom who put this chair behind the bushes next to the court and made her son come over to her every changeover. She would talk out loud in Spanish and acted like she was in charge of the universe. I don’t think that parents can really help a player but it can be distracting to me at times...I’m sure that the kids feel a lot of pressure if they don’t win. The parents initiate it. -Tim

I think that when a kid cheats and the parent does see it, the parents let it roll off and pretend that they don’t see it so the parent is cheating in a sense because they claim that they don’t see it. – Bob

Parental involvement can be unbelievable...I had a mom come up to me after a match and was like “that ball was in. You know it and I know it.” You don’t know what to say to that...I just wish they would stay out of the match. – Jeff

Coach Pressure

The participants felt that coaches had less influence on cheating compared to the parents. In most cases the participants felt that coaches helped prevent cheating by giving the players the skills to win without it. For example, Bob stated, “It definitely depends on the coach but overall coaches are pretty good.” The participants all stated that coaches may even decrease the incidence of cheating because there is someone watching the match instead of the two players on their own.

Tim, Jeff, and Bob all felt that the coaches who traveled with the players did put pressure on the players to cheat because they know that if their player does not win, their job is on the line. The threat of losing their job can put undue pressure on the player. Tim summed up the participants’ thoughts in his statement.

The traveling coaches are the worst. They are there every second of the match. They are just like some of the parents. I have never heard a coach actually tell a player to cheat, but I have heard a lot tell them to call the line close and if they are not sure if it is in or out, just call it out. - Tim

While none of the participants stated that coaches directed their players to cheat, they did state that players who do not have a traveling coach feel extra motivation to beat players who do.

The Stigma of a Cheater

If a player is known as a cheater, the stigma will follow him/her around. During the focus group, the participants were quick to point out a few players that were known for their cheating behavior. Whether or not the participants could back up what they say, it was obvious that a “cheating” player will be stuck with that stigma for his entire junior career. These players are not liked within the competitive tennis social circle either. When the participants mentioned a player who was known as a cheater, the comments were consistently negative such as “I can’t stand him,” “what a loser,” or “sometimes I would just like to punch him.” With these attitudes about cheating players there may be some peer pressure not to cheat.

Implications

After researching possible causes for cheating in junior tennis and listening to the participants, it is hard to blame a junior player who is placed under extreme social pressure to win. They would much rather deal with the negative consequences and maybe even the guilt of cheating or committing a “code” violation rather than negotiate through the negative consequences of losing a match based on social consequences such as parental and coach pressure.. Unfortunately, if a player is not able to cope with the pressures and does cheat, he/she is labeled a cheater or “hooker” for the rest of his/her career. This qualitative inquiry validated some of the reasons that a player might exhibit cheating behaviors such as parental, coach, and personal pressure, but in many cases the findings must be looked at from an individual level. The current study adds to the current

literature on cheating in youth sport and supports the role of multiple influences on cheating behavior. The findings support cheating as a result of parental pressure (Gould, Tuffy, Udry, & Loehr, 1996a, 1996b, 1997) and personal pressure (Hanegby & Tenenbaum, 2001), and to a lesser extent coach pressure (Shields, Bredemeier, Gardner, & Bostrom, 1995; Miller, 2004; Stuart, 2003). The finding that many players felt that a bigger problem may be parents who help a player cheat (or cheat themselves) extends the literature and opens the door for future study on this phenomenon.

The social pressures for each player are different along with a players' ability to cope with the pressures. The negative behavior on the part of parents and coaches is not always problematic. From the author's experience, most of the time, coaches and parents foster player development. For example, most parents provide understanding and support after a tough loss. Coaches help keep the players' motivation and enjoyment for the sport high, and help them master the skills needed to improve. They do not necessarily create negative pressure on the player. When support is perceived as pressure to the athlete, the player may resort to cheating to win. If there is clear communication between the player and his/her social support system, and the players play to have fun instead of to win, there will be a dramatic decrease in the cheating behaviors that are common to the game today.

The findings from this study begin to shed more light on the world of cheating in junior tennis. The problem is recognized by the participants and tennis administrators. The findings from this study can be useful to parents and coaches who may be responsible for some of the cheating behavior in junior tennis. Findings from this study also lend to practical implications. With personal pressure, the findings revealed that the participants felt that cheating occurs most often when a player is in a position to lose. Practically, players may need to be taught mental strategies that can decrease the personal stress that players put on themselves. For example, coaches could be encouraged to try to simulate a pressure situation or put the player in a losing situation during practice, so the player can work on coping strategies that can be used later on in a competitive match. Another example based on the participants' perceptions of parental cheating may be for coaches and/or tennis facilities to hold seminars for parents to give them strategies and/or guidelines for appropriate conduct when their son or daughter is playing in a match. Along the same lines, rules may be established to punish players' parents who are found cheating or contributing to their kids' cheating.

Beyond the world of tennis, the findings reveal that youth sport participation is thought to help moral development: Sports that have a competitive outcome (a winner and a loser) may also foster detrimental moral development in both the youth participants and the parents. Further, this study offered insight and expanded the literature into moral issues experienced by youth in sport as well as the context in which they occur by giving a perspective of this moral issue through the youth voice.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

The current study serves as a preliminary investigation of cheating in tennis from the junior participant perspective. In retrospect, more participants should be used for future studies on this topic. The researcher was committed to understanding the cheating perspective from competitive youth players and due to the location of the researcher's university, the four male players were the only participants who met this requirement.

These conditions also created homogeneity in the sample. While the participants' ages differed, the participants lived close to each other, knew each other previously, and competed in the same competitive tournaments.

Future research can look to overcome the limitations of the current study and expand the knowledge on youth cheating behavior. For example, the participants in this study were all male players. An investigation of female players may identify similarities and differences between genders. For example, in Miller's (2004) study with youth soccer players, males were found to be higher in sportsmanship behaviors in comparison to female participants. The participants also lived in the same geographical region and competed in similar competitive tournaments. While the administration of competitive junior tennis may be consistent throughout the United States, there may be differences in the results of this study based on geographic region and culture. Therefore, the findings may be more representative of the region when compared to a national or international sample. Also, most youth tennis players do not play at the competitive level of the sample in the current study. Future studies may look to compare this behavior based on skill, level of years of playing experience. Also, future studies may look to utilizing multiple focus groups and/or multiple data collection methods such as observations, prolonged engagement with the participants, and qualitative questionnaires to further understand the youth cheating phenomenon.

References

- Australian Broadcast Corporation. (2001). Tennis great questions role of parents in players' lives. *7:30 Report*. Retrieved on January 16, 2001, from <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/stories/s234275.htm>
- Casper, J. M. (2001). *Social influence on norm-breaking behaviors in junior tennis players*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Derry, S. J. (1999). A fish called peer learning: Searching for common themes. In A. M. O'Donnell & A. King (Eds.), *Cognitive perspectives on peer learning* (pp. 197-211). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Eitzen, D. S. (2001). Ethical dilemmas in American sport: The dark side of competition. In D. S. Eitzen (Ed.), *Sport in contemporary society* (pp. 169-179). New York: Worth.
- Gould, D., Tuffy, S., Udry, E., & Loehr, J. (1996a). Burnout in competitive junior tennis players: I. A quantitative psychological assessment. *The Sport Psychologist, 10*, 322-340.
- Gould, D., Tuffy, S., Udry, E., & Loehr, J. (1996b). Burnout in competitive junior tennis players: II. A qualitative analysis. *The Sport Psychologist, 10*, 341-366.
- Gould, D., Tuffy, S., Udry, E., & Loehr, J. (1997). Burnout in competitive junior tennis players: III. Individual differences in the burnout experience. *The Sport Psychologist, 11*, 257-276.
- Hanegby, R., & Tenenbaum, G. (2001). Blame it on the racket: Norm-breaking behaviors among junior tennis players. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 2*, 117-134.

- Kim, B. (2001). Social constructivism. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology* [Electronic version]. Retrieved on July 18, 2005, from <http://www.coe.uga.edu/epltt/SocialConstructivism.htm>
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey M. A. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kukla, A. (2000). *Social constructivism and the philosophy of science*. New York: Routledge.
- McIntosh, P. (1977). *Fair play: Ethics in sport and education*. London: Heinemann.
- McMahon, M. (1997, December). *Social constructivism and the world wide web - A paradigm for learning*. Retrieved on July 18, 2005, from <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/perth97/papers/Mcmahon/Mcmahon.html>
- Miller, B. W. (2004). *Cheating in competitive youth football: The effect of coach-created motivational climate on sport morality*. Oslo, Norway: Norwegian University of Sport and Physical Education.
- Morgan, D. (Ed.). (1993). *Successful focus groups*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Shields, D. L., Bredemeier, B. L., Gardner, D. E., & Bostrom, A. (1995). Leadership, cohesion, and team norms regarding cheating and aggression. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12, 324-336.
- Stewart, D. W., & Shamdasani, P. N. (1990). *Focus groups: Theory and practice*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Stuart, M. E. (2003). Moral issues in sport: The child's perspective. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 74(4), 445-454.
- United States Tennis Association. (2005). *The code: A players' guide to unofficiated matches*. Retrieved February 1, 2005, from <http://www.usta.com/rules/default.sps?iType=924&icustompageid=2518>
- Walker, L. J., Henning, K. H., & Krettenauer, T. (2000). Parent and peer contexts for children's moral reasoning development. *Child Development*, 71(4), 1033-1052.

Author Note

Jonathan M. Casper, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management at North Carolina State University. His research interests include social and psychological aspects of sport marketing, youth and adult recreational sport participation, and sport finance. Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Jonathan Casper, Ph.D. Box 8004, 4012F Biltmore Hall, Parks, Recreation and Tourism Mgt., North Carolina State University Raleigh, NC 27695-8004; E-mail: jonathan_casper@ncsu.edu

Copyright 2006: Jonathan M. Casper and Nova Southeastern University

Article Citation

Casper, J. M. (2006). You can't be serious, that ball was IN: An investigation of junior tennis cheating behavior. *The Qualitative Report*, 11(1), 20-36. Retrieved [Insert date], from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR11-1/casper.pdf>
