



This document is a suggested performance programme for Virtus Member Organisations. It is based on two examples of current nations competing in the Virtus tennis programme.

To have any potential athletes at performance level, a nation needs to have a structured development programme. Below are some examples of how nations identify talented players and provide a year-round programme so that athletes can maximise their potential.

Great Britain



In Great Britain, the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), provides a structured pathway for people with a disability to play tennis. They also have a partnership agreement with Special Olympics GB.

The LTA has worked for many years to increase opportunities for disabled people to access and get involved in tennis. They have set up a national grassroots programme to offer both impairment specific and integrated sessions at many tennis clubs & venues across Great Britain to give disabled people a choice of how to play. The number of tennis venues in the programme continues to grow and they offer advice, support, training and sometimes funding to increase opportunities for disabled people to play regularly.

There are over 220 venues supported by the LTA providing opportunities for disabled people to have fun and stay healthy playing tennis. These are spread across England, Scotland and Wales.

These venues work with their local special schools & units within mainstream schools as well as specific impairment groups like the Downs Syndrome Association, Autistic Society, etc.

In addition, the LTA provide training camps each year across the country. Each camp is open to juniors & adults from complete beginners through to those who play & compete regularly.

The LTA Coaching qualifications all have a disability module so that coaches are introduced to working with people with a disability including a one-day CPD course on learning disability tennis.

Regional Series Tournaments – All ability levels

The LTA run learning disability tournaments for players of all ability levels and all ages. The Series consists of 10 tournaments that are hosted across the UK between January & October with the National Tennis Championships taking place in November.

LTA Talent Philosophy

- To recognise that athletes develop at different rates. To offer a wide range of opportunities to develop key skills throughout our pathway
- To commit to help all athletes develop a clear understanding of the development process and how they can improve
- To design competition structure to provide opportunities for athletes to learn how to develop their skills

- To provide additional support to athletes committed to maximise their potential, who consistently embrace challenges, overcome setbacks, learn from feedback and take ownership of their own development
- To commit to work together to help provide opportunities for athletes to maximise their time on task

What does a player need to excel in tennis?

Becoming a performance player doesn't happen overnight, but if a player has the following then they could be on their way:

- Talent
- Mental toughness and dedication
- Physical fitness
- An ability to set goals – planning ahead and regularly reviewing progress
- A supportive network – parents and coaches

Talent Identification

There are three levels of support that the LTA offers:

Level 1

Talent identification is built into all LTA activities. They look for athletes with drive, determination and movement skills at venues in their grassroots network and at the tennis camps and competitions they run.

Level 2

Selection is where athletes identified at Level 1 are invited to attend specific talent selection camps – Performance Days. There athletes will be assessed against criteria including mobility, movement, technical skill and tactical awareness.

Level 3

Development is for athletes who meet the criteria at Level 2 who then get support from the LTA's National Coaching Team including training weekends/camps and funding support.

LTA Learning Disability GB Programme – 2 tier

National Disability Coaching Team

LTA GB Squad (top players) LTA training weekends – up to 6 per year

LTA GB Development Squad/Emerging players LTA training weekends – 4 per year

The LTA provide the following support for athletes on the GB Programme

- National level coaching and player visits to home programmes as appropriate
- National training weekends/camps
- Basic Sports science and medicine support as required
- Costs of sending selected team and staff to the Virtus competitions.
- Costs of travel expenses & accommodation for players to attend national training weekends/camps

The national coaching team will support athletes and local coaches to develop a weekly performance programme to include

- Individual lessons
- Mainstream squad session
- Hitting session
- Fitness/gym work
- Serving practise (3 x 20 mins)
- Match play/competitions (in mainstream tournaments)

Athletes & families must:

- Sign an annual agreement
- Keep a weekly log of training, physical activity & match play/competition results
- Have a National Tennis Rating (mainstream)
- Attend training camps/events as part of the LTA Learning Disability GB Programme

In 2017, Great Britain hosted the INAS World Championships in Bolton.

Costs

The LTA's annual cost to provide a GB programme for their most talented players is approximately £29,000 (£19,000 for training weekends/camps, coach fees, court hire, accommodation, equipment etc, £10,000 for attending Virtus competitions)

Australia



Tennis Australia was one of four sports to receive significant funding for Inclusion of people with a disability from the Australian Sports Commission (Federal Government) in 1991 and employed a fulltime Integration Coordinator who worked to build national and state initiatives. Throughout the 1990's and 2000's Tennis Australia has had designated staff working to build inclusive pathways and opportunities. The last few coordinators have worked to build the inclusive strategies of State Tennis Associations and build the mini circuits and other high performance opportunities.

Grass Roots programme

Sport Inclusion Australia formerly AUSRAPID commenced working with inclusive tennis initiatives in 1991 with Tennis Victoria. The Australian Tennis Foundation funds were used to pay a couple of

coaches in the Metro area to coach youngsters with an intellectual disability. Tennis Victoria was the first State Tennis Association to commence working with players with a disability. They had an excellent wheelchair pathway and worked to include players with an intellectual disability as well.

In 2001, the first National Coach was appointed and further work was done in South Australia and other states to emulate what had been done in Victoria. This included come and try days, camps and identification sessions.

Tennis New South Wales (NSW) conducted camps for players with an intellectual disability in 2003 and worked to build up an inclusive competition.

Since then Tennis Australia has encouraged all states and territory Tennis Associations to conduct mini circuits and inclusive initiatives with Queensland taking a lead role.

Sport Inclusion Australia has member associations in seven State/Territories, with the exception of the Australian Capital Territory and they work in partnership with their respective Tennis Body to enhance inclusive opportunities.

Talent Philosophy

To identify talented players who demonstrate not only the appropriate athleticism and skill but a desire to improve with the capacity to listen and learn.

Talent Identification

Players mainly come from mainstream clubs and special school programmes.

The mini circuits have proven very useful in identifying young talent and a few key coaches with a passion for working in this area have been able to help attract players. The State events are growing every year, led by Tennis Australia.

Tournaments

Tennis Victoria included wheelchair players and players with an intellectual disability in the Victorian Hardcourts in 1996. This was such a success that Tennis Australia conducted a national event for players with an intellectual disability alongside the National Wheelchair event for the first time in 1998 and it has continued until now and is called the Australian Tennis Championships. This event has been sanctioned by INAS for the past three years and has boasted international competitors for many years, particularly from Japan.

Sport Inclusion Australia in conjunction with Tennis Australia conducted Australia's first INAS World Event – 2004 INAS World Tennis Championships.

A number of the State Tennis Associations have conducted quite a number of mini circuits per year, which is mainly for intermediate and advanced players. Australia-wide there are four State tournaments for intermediate and advanced level players in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

The National Tournament is the Australian Tennis Championships – primarily intermediate and advanced level players.

Performance Programme

Tennis Australia support the representation at an International Level. Tennis Australia supports the State bodies with their State tournaments and provide education in "inclusive coaching" in their tennis coaching courses.

Currently there are no set training requirements for athletes but most have individual lessons, squad training, off court training at a gym or personal training per week as well as competing in mainstream tournaments when possible.

There is now a ranking system, selection criteria, national event and an international pathway. Players with an intellectual disability are eligible to nominate for National and State Player of the Year awards, which are included in the gala main awards each year.

Sport Inclusion Australia has been in meetings with a restructured Tennis Australia Community Tennis department to negotiate the future - Elite pathways, National Coach, High Performance camps, Australian Tennis Championship being conducted by Australian Open, talent identification, school sport development amongst other issues.

In 2019 Australia hosted the Global Games in Brisbane.

Costs

The biggest stumbling block for High Performance is finance. It is mostly self-funded. Australia's flight budget alone is astronomical to constantly compete in Europe etc. Tennis Australia commits a great deal to the Australian Tennis Championships event each year and makes a contribution to High Performance, but they are constantly seeking additional support.

Nationally there isn't any training weekends, sport science or medical support. Tennis Australia contributes approximately \$8,000 towards the total team costs. In 2016, the State Bodies contributed \$1000 per athlete from their state.

If you would like any advice or support on putting together a performance level programme for your players, contact Lesley Whitehead – Virtus Tennis Director Lesley.whitehead@virtus.sport