

## **Part I: The Need for a USTA/ITA Player Rating System**

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*A well-designed rating system is a vital piece and key link needed in the USTA's player development program, providing a comprehensive pathway for the future development of American players. Further, the level-based competitions that would become possible at all levels would not only increase the competitiveness of a greater percentage of our up-and-coming players, but would also provide a healthier developmental environment for young players aside from tennis.*

This paper is not concerned with the accuracy of rankings at the top of any group. Although important, it is a far lower priority than increasing the competitiveness and productivity of the system as a whole. This paper concerns itself with the challenge of making American tournament structures more efficient and affordable, which will in turn increase the productivity of our player development system more than any other change we can make. The current system works only for the top 5% of wage earners in the U.S. To be direct, the data argues convincingly that this shift will have a greater impact on America's ability to attract and retain new participants - and to be more competitive on the world stage - than anything else we could do.

I offer a blueprint for remedying these problems and others.

### **What is the difference between a rating system and a ranking system?**

While these words are often used interchangeably. I have defined a ranking system as a system for evaluating the order of players' ability. A rating system, while it may also represent the order of players, also shows the *ability of one player relative to another*. In short, while we know how many players there are within the Player Development system of rankings within separate age groups, we lack an accurate "inventory" of how many players we have at each level of play.

In a given population of six players, the first four of whom are Nadal, Federer, Djokovich and Murray, let's suppose that you are #5 and I am #6. Because you are ranked #5, it appears that both you and I are close in ability to Murray. With no disrespect intended, but assuming for the sake of this illustration that neither you nor I are in fact close in ability to Murray, this example illustrates to a useful degree that rankings show only the order of ability, not the actual level of players. So, in the U.S., while USTA Player Development knows *how many* competitive players it has in various narrow age groups, it has no actual data *how many players it has at specific levels, or in what parts of the country*. Without this "inventory," it cannot sensibly allocate its resources (players of the

next level up) to facilitate play at the level needed.

One of the major benefits of using universal rating system is the mountain of data that it would provide about our junior and pro pipeline. We are living in the information age and tennis could be the sports pioneer in using data to track and develop players. Just like putting a bar code on a cereal box, a universal rating system would help the USTA and ITA determine how many players are “on the shelf” - so to speak - at each level in each geographical area. Almost akin to a national “energy grid” that allows energy to be moved around the country where it is most needed, sections and national would have a detailed map of their constituents’ levels and locations, and would have the ability to determine what level tournaments will precisely meet players’ developmental competitive needs. USTA Pro Circuit folks could work with Junior Competition to organize or move tournaments to nourish developmental needs. Each player would have a whole “personal history” of his progress in the game – one could analyze their peaks and valleys and correlate that information with other players and variables to ascertain why they are improving or failing to progress. This precise allocation of resources would become the tennis equivalent of “drip irrigation,” the technique which has been so successful in agriculture.

In areas where we now have a tennis “desert”, we could begin to grow “gardens.”

### **The Crux of the Matter**

As Dr. K. Anders Ericsson of the Psychology Department of Florida State University, noted in the popular book, *The Talent Code*, the more frequently players face competition that tests them, the faster they improve.

To make tennis truly the “sport of opportunity,” players must be able to scale the developmental ladder “locally.” A flight is still a flight...and travel is going to cost a great deal more in the near future.

### **Competitive Threshold**

Thanks to research by Dave Howell, we now know that a typical USTA sectional tournament yields a match that reaches a “Competitive Threshold” (a patented feature of UTR) only about 25% of the time, while the ITA and ATP tour events reach this threshold about 70% of the time.

Howell’s approach computes the relative strength of players by comparing scores, rather than relying on wins or losses or awarding points for round reached. It is also possible to determine whether a match was “competitive,” or, in his system, whether it reached a certain “competitive threshold.”

Howell’s approach tracks the percentage of matches within a given event that reach a competitive threshold (which he designates as winning 7 or more games won in a two-set match). Typically, age-group events have a wide range of abilities, which results in a much lower percentage of competitive matches (as low as 25% often). Level-based play, however, often creates a competitive ratio of 70%.

Large draws with too many levels of play are inefficient. At Kalamazoo the best players have to be at the tournament at the same time as the least experienced players, but may go a week before they play a match that reaches the Competitive Threshold. For example, in 2009, the main singles draw at Kalamazoo in the 18s yielded a 42% competitive ratio. Chase Buchanan, the winner, had played one year of college tennis and won the tournament without having one match that reached the Competitive Threshold! The vast majority of the players at Kalamazoo come from sections whose sectional championships reach the CT 37% of the time. Age-based tournaments yield less developmental value for the time and money spent than level-based events.

Contrast this with DI intercollegiate and professional tennis. Using the 7-game threshold as a guide, Men's Grand Slam events render a 70% competitive ratio (10-game threshold due to 3 out of 5). The same is true for ITA Men's events. WTA Grand Slams and ITA Women's tournament are at 55%.

### **USTA Player Development Wants to Keep Players from Skipping Levels**

USTA Player Development has recently adopted a policy that players should have to earn their way from one level of play to another. Without ratings, however, players must move through ever-widening (and expensive) geographical areas of competition (i.e., age-group play in which players play through state, sectional, and national opens to make the nationals).

As currently configured, these geographical fields are not really "steps" up a ladder, but rather "hoops" that must be jumped through. They are only tangentially related to "levels of play." As a result, these hoops are considerably less efficient in producing as high a percentage of matches that reach a certain Competitive Threshold (C.T. is a feature of the Universal Tennis Rating\*) as the ITA and ATP level-based systems.

***This is the key distinction that must be grasped. Once understood, it is easy to see how a local, level-based system of tournaments that encourages play across age groups (like France) could not only increase the rate of player development, but do so at enormous cost savings for everyone, including users and the USTA itself.***

### **History**

Over the last 100 years, players in the United States have been developed primarily through age- and gender-based events, the results of which are used to determine their rankings. Each year, committees meet to assess the effect of these efforts, and each year new regulations are attempted as a means of achieving these primary goals of player development and growing the game. Most recognize that something is missing, but no one is quite sure what to do about it. Everyone is concerned with how, or even if, the U.S. will find its next generation of champions.

As Einstein pointed out so well, "We can't solve the problems we now have by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."

### **Other Countries**

Other countries have become more progressive in implementing certain innovations, which have resulted in a more unified approach to developing world-class players. While we devote time and money to studying the training methods of other countries, we have not, until recently, begun a thorough examination of the benefits of other countries' system for ranking and rating players. Spain, for instance, uses a ranking system whereby every player in the country is ranked in the same system [www.rfet.es](http://www.rfet.es). The Spanish Federation ranks some 19,500 men/boys on the same list; there are over 8,000 women/girls ranked as well. Men and women are on separate lists. The Swedish ranking system is similar to the Spanish system; all males in the country are on the same list, and the females on a second list. This type of system affords juniors the opportunity to compete with adults. The current ATP ranking shows 6 Americans (down from 9 a year ago) in the top 100; in the WTA top 100 there are 8 (up from 5 a year ago) Americans; the U.S. population is 305 million. France has 13 men and 5 women in the top 100, with a population of 65 million; Spain has 11 men and 4 women, with a population of 40 million.

The French in particular have made great strides over the last 10 years by adding what we would call a "rating" system to their system of age and gender-based tournaments. Information on their rating system can be found at [www.tennis-classim.net](http://www.tennis-classim.net). France's system is highly effective. Players from all over the world visit France in the summer and are able to find the appropriate level of tournament easily. There are about 5,000 tournaments each summer in France! Tournaments typically run over a two-week period. Players of one level begin the tournament, which then allow the qualifiers to move on to play against players of a higher level, and so on. There is usually a back draw. In this format, players know exactly where to enter a given tournament, and are placed with other players of a similar level. The best players don't enter the draw until several rounds later.

The French system should not be confused with a form of "block" seeding that has been suggested for use at some national events. Since our ranking system, and therefore our policy for "seeding" players, is based on the Points Per Round (PPR), block seeding cannot be done effectively, since our rankings are not accurate enough to convey a player's level, nor do they reflect ability across age groups.

In France, each player's first match is going to be against a player who has played through from one rating below. This is the "nervous" match for the higher rated player. He or she must pass the first round to play someone from the same level, playing for the opportunity to play someone at the next higher level. In the U.S., since players in one age group cannot now be compared to players in another age group (unless the younger players have played "up"), it often appears that a younger player who plays up has "upset" an older player. In reality, it may be no upset at all. Recent data provided by preliminary Universal Tennis Rating numbers suggest that many of the best 16-and-under players are among the best 18-and-under players, although they don't regularly compete in the 18's. The French system reinforces the wisdom of the coaching axiom that the best ratio of competition is achieved with an even ratio of "play down, play even, play up."

While the U.S. approach to its tournament and ranking system has remained largely unchanged over decades (with regard to age- and gender-based play), with the exception that rankings have for some time now been based on points earned per round (PPR). Although the PPR system has most definitely stimulated more play, it has brought with it a number of other unintended consequences. The rankings are not accurate, since they do not reflect level of ability. PPR gives different credit for beating the same player in different rounds or different age groups. And a win over a lower ranked player in the semi-finals receives much more weight than a win against a highly ranked player in the first round. Wealthier players who can travel more easily, or players who have gone to online schooling, have the advantage, as players can search lists of tournament entrants to find the weakest National Opens. More players must make sacrifices in their education to play the required number of events. USTA rankings are given relatively little consideration by college coaches.

Meanwhile, other major international tennis organizations continue to innovate. Tennis Europe plans to offer a Unified Ranking System for Junior Players. The system is devised to give a unified overall list that shows the relative strengths of all players, regardless of where they achieved their results or picked up points. A player's total includes points from Tennis Europe Junior Tour 16 and 14 & Under events, plus points earned by players in these age categories who participate in ITF Junior Circuit and professional tournaments, all of which are weighted according to their relative strengths. The 14 & Under ranking will continue to be available separately, as well as being integrated into the overall rankings.

The USTA has fallen well behind in its programs/approach relative to its foreign counterparts and cannot afford to stand still any longer on this issue.

### **Advantages of a Rating System**

With a properly designed system, American player development could shift into overdrive.

- Players who grow up with the opportunity to compete regularly against older players would learn how to “play the game” sooner and better, rather than just learning to hit the ball well.
- Local level-based competitions would reduce missed class-time and the pressure to resort to online schooling due to the considerable travel needed to compete nationally. The rate of home-schooling among competitive junior players is presently out of control.
- More level-based competitions available locally would allow players to remain “potted” for longer in their home soil, which would likely produce more emotionally healthy, “hardier” human beings.
- It would encourage more elite adult players to stay in the game longer. Most “junior vets” can still beat most junior players. These players will be an essential component in building local level-based events that are competitive enough to challenge rising juniors. As a side note, Ray Benton of the Junior Tennis Champions Center and a recently-designated Regional

Training Center, noted that involving post-college or tour players in this way would also keep their thoughts in the game, as they each move forward in their careers. By keeping them involved, they are more likely to get involved administratively or as volunteers and/or sponsors in the future.

- It would provide more “at risk” juniors (juniors who are not good enough to win a round in regular age-based competitions and are likely to give up) with more friendly entry-level tournament play
- Local level-based competitions would make tennis more affordable, since it would make it easy for thousands more players – young and old - to find suitable competition locally, without the need for extensive travel.
- It would make clearer the steps involved in moving from one level of play to another. Players would be less apt to “skip a step,” (a primary goal of the player development program outlined by Patrick McEnroe in September, 2009).

**In addition to meeting the needs of so many USTA “shareholders” (parents, coaches, college players, juniors, etc.), having a universal singles rating would facilitate an increase in participation overall, and give more players currently playing outside the USTA system (especially 340,000 high school players) more incentive to participate in level-based events.**

#### **QUICK START: How to grow the New “800 pound gorilla”**

When we consider the many millions of dollars of investment that the USTA is now making in Quick Start, what better way to engage potentially a hundred thousand newcomers to the game than by awarding them a “universal” rating? Ratings take away the embarrassment that rankings can produce (when rankings goes into the thousands, for instance!). It would be unwise to think that a 10-year-old would be totally “psyched” to be told that he/she is ranked say, #102,592 in the United States.

Now imagine a young player’s response (and his/her parents) after playing in a level-based introductory tournament and winning it, to receiving a letter that said “Congratulations on achieving your first USTA/Universal Tennis Rating. With this rating, you are now qualified to play in the following local level-based events, with nominal entry fees, and entry-level friendly round-robin and/or compass draw play.” While the majority of young children may never need more than these opportunities, precocious players will quickly advance through these events. Opportunities for those less successful will still abound, so these players need not be lost to other activities as they are now.

#### **Using the Right “Lure”**

While individual rankings will always be desirable and motivating for the best players, players ranked well down in the 200’s and 300’s tend to be embarrassed, not motivated, by an undistinguished ranking. Rankings sometimes encourage players to “duck” competitions in which a loss would dramatically hurt their ranking. Since individual losses don’t have as obvious an effect on one’s standing within much larger groups of players, players tend not to worry as much about the effect of a loss on their rating.

A rating system need not interfere with the present system of national events, since it can be done simply in parallel alongside the rankings. National competitions would, of course, still be necessary to determine the standings of elite players. However, it is likely that most junior players, and certainly adults, will get used to identifying themselves by their universal rating, rather than by their age-group ranking, since they will be able to improve their universal rating by competing in events outside of their age group (i.e. Adult Open tournaments, Campus Showdowns, ITA Summer Circuit events, USTA Wildcard playoffs, etc.). It would eventually be more accurate to select players for the nationals or for international squads based on their ratings instead of their points per round (“PPR”) age-based rankings.

### **Increasing Capacity to Accomplish Greater Tasks**

A group of individual computers, when linked, can accomplish tasks that cannot be accomplished singly. Similarly, the efforts of the PD program of the USTA would be similarly boosted by linking these separate data pools to produce a universal singles rating for everyone. The following independent categories, while separate unto themselves now, will all become interconnected in the future.

- Quick Start
- Junior (10’s, 12’s, 14’s, 16’s, 18’s)
- High school
- ITF junior events
- College - conference, regional, and national team and individual competitions
- ITA Summer Circuit
- College “club” tennis through “Tennis on Campus” sectional and national competitions
- International intercollegiate events, such as the World University Games or the Master’U BNP Paribas recently held in France
- Adult leagues
- Senior age-group events, International Club events
- Professional tournaments, and World Team Tennis and Davis and Fed Cup Competitions

### **Is There a Problem, Officer?**

Regardless of whether categories are based on age, education, or sectional membership, similar kinds of problems arise in the proper identification of a player’s level when players move from one category to another.

- Juniors who age “up” (e.g. move up from the 14’s into the 16’s) lose all the points they have earned in one age group and have to begin all over again, at great expense in time and money. Most competitive juniors play up about 50% of the time to combat this flaw.
- Potential recruits have no way of knowing whether they are good enough to make a given college varsity team.
- High School players have no way of knowing whether they can make a college club team.
- Inter-sectional results do not help one’s sectional ranking; i.e a New England

junior who lives adjacent to the Eastern Section can play tournaments in the Eastern section more economically, but cannot get credit within their home section for any good results, nor will the Eastern section allow him to play in their own qualifying tournaments.

- Blue chip first year college players cannot qualify for national collegiate events based on their junior rankings.
- Senior rankings, too, are based on PPR. Players from different age groups have to be evaluated based not on their level, but on the points they have accumulated, which makes selection of players for international competitions unnecessarily subjective.

### **Administrative Nightmares Caused by Transitions from One Category to Another**

In most categories, it is challenging to sort out the best way to handle these transitions. Imagine how much time it must take USTA volunteers and staff to make similar decisions when they must bridge the information gap that exists between so many different transition points, year after year.

A universal singles rating would of course take most of the guesswork out of this time-consuming process.

The positive effects of a global rating system would be clearly felt at the local level as well. It would give many more players a clear and motivating pathway for improvement at any level of the game. With more players of a certain skill level available within smaller geographical areas, it would be possible to create hundreds of level-based competitions across the U.S. each drawing players of similar abilities – regardless of age or possibly sex - from within a smaller geographical radius. For example, local competitions could include emerging grammar school juniors, talented high school varsity players, college varsity and club tennis players, local pros, and adults.

### **Other Kinks in the System**

In addition, while the PPR ranking system has proven to be effective in making players play more tournaments, it has failed to solve some other problems:

- Players get no credit in their own age group for good wins when they play “up.” Some sections have adopted such a system, but it only works in one direction - down; good wins down don’t do anything for the next group up, which still results in very poor seeding. While the points that a player wins can be credited towards their ranking in their natural age group, they will not likely earn as many points in the higher division as they would by playing in their own age group - regardless of the quality of their “up” wins.
- Inaccurate seedings and skewed results are almost inevitable when talented younger players “play up.”
- Rankings based on per-round play have no predictive value for college coaches. College coaches rely primarily on tennisrecruiting.net (which lists rankings, but which also provides a rough approximation of their relative success against players their age in several categories), not the USTA rankings.

- “Winning can be confusing,” as Steve Smith, the well-known developmental coach from Tampa pointed out. A high ranking in any age group, however weak the competition or however small the pool of players, encourages a young player to keep doing what he is doing, which for 12-14-year olds can be a hindrance to their development. More competition against older and more experienced players in a ratings-based system would encourage and reward more aggressive juniors and help more passive, one-dimensional players to hone the attacking skills needed to compete with the collegiate and even players who have played the pro circuit.

### **U. S. Education at Risk... Has the PPR System Become Part of the Problem?**

The present PPR ranking system puts even greater stress on young players to either resort to online schooling, or to stay in school formally but miss more school than their counterparts in almost any other elite sport. Either choice puts their futures at even greater risk.

Educational “think tanks” continue to warn that the U.S. educational system in general is already at risk, and is not keeping pace with many other countries. They warn that if the U.S. wants to remain competitive economically, it will have to change its ways. The trend toward more on-line schooling is not the change that is needed.

Young people need guidance. They will naturally want to take a path that seems more glamorous – after all, they are only trying to “live their dream.” Only when it is too late do they find that they have mortgaged their futures unwisely – and most often unnecessarily.

Many top junior players in the last 20 years either dropped out of school or relied on home schooling or online programs to pursue their dreams, only to end up on the “failed to make it” list, with little to fall back on, and unable even to get into a college.

If we know that only a few players out of thousands will actually become the Andy Roddicks of the future, can we afford to continue with a system that – whether intentional or not - mortgages their futures after tennis? How responsible is that?

### **Staying Closer to Home**

Over the last 40 years, the nuclear family concept has been under assault for a variety of reasons.

Other sports keep their juniors closer to home. Young swimmers, who arguably put in more time in the pool than most tennis players do on the court, all can stay in school. They benefit from a club system, run on most college campuses. Swimmers can compete locally because they can compare their times with anyone, and don’t have to forego traditional schooling to seek competition that requires extensive travel. We can do better with a rating system that keeps the vast majority of players close to home and in the game.

### **Producing Hardier Individuals and Better Competitors**

Local competitions based on level would give more young players the chance to remain “potted” in their home soil longer. This would arguably help them to grow into “hardier” people. While Patrick McEnroe and the national coaches are now wisely advising all but the most outstanding prospects to go to college, their efforts are still at odds with the PPR ranking system, which incentivizes point-chasing and play across multiple age divisions.

One reason why academies have become so prevalent is that they offer the flexibility needed to compete within this PPR system. There are unquestionably outstanding coaches and people associated with many of the academies. Academies, however, by their nature, focus primarily on one facet of a young player’s development, often at the expense of other necessary supports.

It is only natural for up-and-coming players to want to do what they see the best players doing. When our best players are forced to rely on the academy approach, it encourages many others to do the same. Even at a Regional Training Center, such as the Junior Tennis Champions Center in College Park, MD, where some of the players still live at home, most of the players have moved to some form of on-line education. Contrast this with Division I college programs, where players have an even stronger competition, and are still able to remain in traditional college curricula.

Consider that Patrick McEnroe’s message is that 99% of players should go to college. In support of Jon Vegosen’s call that tennis be not only “The Sport of Opportunity,” but also the sport that promotes education (a charge which is now even included in the Jr. Competition Committee mission statement), we must create a healthier culture in which aspiring players are not forced to mortgage their future educational opportunities during their high school years, and will arrive at college fully prepared for the academic challenges.

When a player can remain in a more traditional school environment, stay at home with his or her family, develop lasting friendships with a wide range of people, play with other adults who have had tennis as a big part of their lives, and have non-tennis mentors, it is safe to say that that individual is less at risk of becoming involved in non-productive (at best) and harmful (at worst) activities in this critical period of his or her personal development. It is one of the indirect benefits to the club tennis system in Europe.

College coaches know this from experience. Anecdotally, coaches are often dismayed at the lack of fundamental reading and writing skills they see with residential academy players they recruit. They also find they are often less emotionally ready to understand the nature of team play, and seem to burn out more often. And, of course, they often find that academy tennis players who have devoted most of their time just to tennis, while making an end-run around school, and without the stability of a more balanced life, often lack maturity and judgment (both on and off the court).

If “it takes a village to raise a child,” why then are we surprised that many “away from home” academy-raised players - without the traditional supports of family - are less

equipped to deal with life's vicissitudes, i.e. less hardy? Not only are they less able to function independently on the circuit than their international counterparts – but also they are less independent and self-reliant in matters off the court.

Even for those players who do resist the temptation to attend school online, the hunt for ranking points in their age group and the next age group up requires missing excessive amounts of school. One mid-level recruit last year casually mentioned that he missed 38 days of school the previous year to keep his national and ITF ranking up. That is over 7 weeks of classes!

We can and must do better if we are to produce the best players possible and fulfill the USTA's mission to promote and develop the growth of tennis, that does not pressure the majority of young players to unnecessarily compromise their futures.

### **U.S. Juniors Don't Play the Game As Well...**

It is an oft-heard criticism of U.S. juniors that they hit the ball well, but don't understand the game as well as their international counterparts. Once in the junior development system, in which they must devote time and energy to seeking points, they have little time and no formal incentive to play against more experienced opponents in matches that don't "count." Too many clinics are based on "pay-to-play", with too few opportunities to practice match play. Too often, young players in junior clinics are grouped 4 to a court, and are expected to hit cross-courts or be fed balls for an hour and a half because the economics work better for the professional under that structure. 13- and 14-year-olds do not learn the subtleties of the game as quickly from peers with similar styles as they would, for instance, from playing the club champion who looks like a hack but never misses. Contrast this with a comment from a collegiate player who had grown up in the French rating system: *"As a 12 year-old, I was good enough in French tournaments to play with adults and older juniors. They sliced me; drop-shotted me, hooked me, pushed me around, and always tried to intimidate me. By the time I was 15, I had seen it all and knew how to play tennis."* Damien Lacombe, former VCU player.

### **Geographical Challenges Unique to the U.S.**

In France, players can take a train to just about any tournament they need to play. The same goes for Spain.

The U.S. covers a huge area many times the size of France and Spain combined. There are far fewer players of similar ability and age within most given geographical areas than there are, for instance, in Europe. To get to other players of the same age requires players to travel considerable distances to find suitable competition, which puts tremendous stress on families, resources, time, and education.

Relative to France, the geography of the U.S. makes producing the critical density of players needed for players to develop locally challenging, but far from impossible. It was once thought that food could not be grown in the desert for lack of water. Now it can be by using the "drip irrigation" method, in which water is applied drop by drop, directly at

the plant's roots where it is needed. There is little waste.

It will be possible to generate sufficient numbers of participants if a multi-pronged approach is used. Summer tournaments must offer formats and levels of competition that will encourage the many hundreds of competitive players in college to want to play during the summer. These tournaments, as in France, must allow post-college and post-tour players to earn enough money to justify weekend or evening time spent away from careers. They must be attractive to up-and-coming junior players interested in playing college tennis. And they *should actually try to draw players from abroad* who are interested in coming to college.

Areas that are now relative deserts of tennis development could begin to develop, while areas like the South that already have highly competitive juniors could become even more likely to produce standout prospects. Sweden at one time produced large numbers of champions. There is no reason that an area like the Southern section couldn't be similarly productive, as contiguous states begin to raise the bar for each other.

### **Show Me the Money**

The present costs of developing a nationally competitive player are well beyond the reach of most families. It was estimated in 2006 that it costs families between \$25,000-\$75,000 *per year* from the ages of 12-18. If U.S. tennis is to compete with other sports, which produce talent through more locally-based development systems, tennis must become more affordable.

Unfortunately, the current is moving strongly in the wrong direction. For the first time in 75 years, the level of prosperity did not increase in the U.S. Family incomes on average in 2008, if computed for inflation, were equal to what they were in 1999. We can only imagine the impact if the data were computed based on 2009 statistics. Tennis is already comparable to figure skating – available only to those who are well-to-do or happen to be in the right place at the right time to catch the eye of a potential sponsor or earn a scholarship. The most popular sports in the U.S. are inexpensive and easy to play at the local and regional level. Some of the best basketball players in the NBA developed their skills by simply playing competitive pick-up games in their neighborhoods, in playgrounds, and on their high school varsity teams.

If the USTA hopes to get more and better athletes to play and stick with tennis, what better way could it find than one that offers more frequent competitive opportunities locally and on a much more affordable basis? This would surely be enough to encourage more families of modest resources to keep their kids involved in tennis.

### **Ratings Create New Opportunities ...Opportunities Create Hope... Everyone Wins**

Hope is a powerful elixir - the opportunity to advance to the next level is a vital and necessary incentive at any level of participation.

- *In addition to the college players, post-college players constitute the USTA's player development's greatest untapped resource. The best college players*

*have been “educated” at a cost of approximately \$500,000 (the sum of what it cost to develop that player added to the value of a college scholarship). With the exception of the adult league play, adult tournament participation at the elite level has dropped in the last 30 years. Because they are hard at work professionally or academically - and frequently financially strapped - few young adults can afford to give up a weekend to play in a tournament. By offering “short” prize money to encourage this group to contribute their experience and expertise by local level-based events on weekends, the USTA would get a far greater “bang for its buck” than many of its present expensive programs that require travel. The presence of these post-college players would automatically raise the level of play available locally – just where it will be needed most to help develop top juniors through competition.*

- In addition, of the 20,000 players who play on college varsity teams, only a few hundred will ever make it to the NCAAs. The remaining 19,000+ would love to have their results apply towards their rating, which would automatically carry over into summer and post-college play.
- Every college team has players who don’t regularly play in the top six. With the chance to improve their rating, non-starters would have the incentive to play harder and keep improving in every competition – whether a tournament or an “exhibition” match at a dual match,.
- High school players would know whether they are good enough to be recruited or whether they should set their sights on playing on a college club team. In any given 4-year period, there are approximately 340,000 high school players, with only 20,000 total roster spots on varsity teams. Ratings would give the high school tennis system an enormous boost. College club teams would no longer have to schedule other collegiate club teams to find an appropriate level of play, when they could play against local clubs in the area at a fraction of the cost. All results would count toward one’s rating, whether a player was on a college club team, or a private club team.
- Even local club players, whose skills are not good enough to qualify them for a ranking - and who probably don’t even have an interest in getting one - would find local level-based events attractive, thereby increasing the diversity of styles that upcoming kids need to see and deal with in order to develop.
- Thousands of players who are presently ineligible for rankings would be encouraged to keep trying if offered friendly, entry level-based events that would be counted toward their rating. In a sample taken from the USTA New England’s player list, there were approximately 2,000 boys and 1,175 girls (from all junior age levels) who had played in one or more tournaments, but had not won a single match. Why not? Many of these juniors played in one age-based (not level-based) junior tournament where they probably drew one of the top seeds and were beaten soundly. If there are over 3,000 players in New England alone in this category, imagine how many tens of thousands of young players there are across the country who might be encouraged to continue in tournament play if they had had more fun – perhaps even won a match! - in their first events. Although each USTA section has tournaments

(the names for these levels may differ from one section to another) that are intended to offer competitive opportunities to these ranking-ineligible players, they draw far fewer participants than the next level up because they do not award points. Even if shortened match formats are used, results could easily be applied toward one's rating.

- If so many juniors are now being lost because of our system or because of a poor experience in their first age-group tournaments, what is going to be different for all the players who have been introduced to the game through QuickStart programs once they have “graduated” from QuickStart size courts and competition?
- While some players may not be good enough to merit a ranking (based on a 2 out of 3 tiebreak match length), imagine their delight if they knew that by winning a level-based event, they could qualify for a USTA “universal rating.” It could keep them in the game for a lifetime. And, who knows how many of their friends might be encouraged to pursue tennis?

### **Harnessing the College Tennis Engine**

Varsity college tennis programs – with their great depth of American and international talent – can be the vital link towards increasing opportunities for junior players to get rigorous local competition at a lower cost. It is a lot less expensive to put together level-based events that utilize the best that college tennis has to offer than it is to “re-pot”<sup>14</sup> junior players and send them to Florida or California – or even abroad. Just as we are all being encouraged to buy food that is locally grown to reduce the damage of “transportation air miles,” a rating system would reduce damage to the environment, to pocketbooks, and to the educational opportunities of our youth.

For many years, NCAA recruiting rules unfortunately have created an “iron curtain” between juniors and college players. Since this barrier exists in no other country than the U.S., we have – practically speaking - been asking our juniors to develop into champions with one arm tied behind their backs. Contrast this with how players used to develop before these NCAA rules were strictly enforced: Eliot Teltscher said that without the opportunity to compete regularly as a 16-year-old against college players from Pepperdine, USC and UCLA, he would never have been prepared to turn pro (and ironically, to skip college!).

In addition to widening the base by putting more juniors into the system, and giving them more competitive matches, a rating system is necessary to realize the potential of the NCAA-approved “Campus Showdown” format. Campus Showdowns are one-day, short format tournaments open to juniors, college players, professionals and adults, usually held on a Sunday or Saturday. Currently, draws are compass draws for both singles and doubles with matches being one set with a tiebreaker at 5-5, although format and scoring is at the discretion of the tournament director (often a college coach). Events can be men's, women's, or co-ed. Entry fees are extremely affordable, and the competition is terrific when the right levels are present. With little travel time, there's still enough time for players to do their homework and spend some time with their families and friends, and parents still get to “have a life.”

Thankfully, the Campus Showdown format now offers a pathway that reduces these barriers. Entry to these tournaments, to meet NCAA rules, cannot be based on age or year in school. Without universal ratings, there exists no reliable way for juniors to determine the proper level of Showdown they should enter. With them, the best teens in virtually every area of the country could test their skills regularly against collegians and even professionals in their communities. How much easier for all would it be if the USTA website listed Level-based Showdowns that could be found locally throughout the country so that players could easily discern the proper level of competitive event to enter? It's easy to imagine the enormous cost savings that would be possible if the three top players at the Junior Tennis Champions Center (all top 20 ITF juniors) were – instead of traveling to the Far East to play in satellite events - play regularly against the players at UVA, only an hour and a half car drive away.

Unfortunately, a junior's play, as noted previously, is not counted towards his/her ranking, so there is a disincentive to play an event that would be arguably less expensive and more competitive than an age-based national qualifying tournament.

Even the least competitive Division III or community college teams could host competitive one-day tournaments for younger junior competitors. Even "tennis on campus" club team could host Campus Showdowns for lower rating levels.

Eventually, however, if Campus Showdown results are to be counted toward one's rating, new formats, perhaps extending over two weekends, will allow full 2-of-3 set matches so that results will be more reliable. Events structured according to level would have all the advantages of tournaments in France, where players enter on different weekends according to their levels.

### **Barriers to Utilizing the Engine of the Collegiate System for Junior Player Development**

The USTA player development program and the Collegiate Committee have worked jointly to help mitigate the losses of programs from the college system, which threatens this remarkable "engine" (statistically, the competitiveness of Division I play reaches 70%, on par with the ATP level of competitiveness). With the exception of perhaps major 10-15 college programs that are supported at revenue sport levels, however, college tennis coaches are underpaid, overworked, and greatly under-respected (as coaches of non-revenue sports). Without well-thought out incentives, it is unrealistic to think that college coaches will automatically make coordinating their team schedules with local junior development tournament schedules, or making their players available as practice partners for upcoming juniors, a greater priority.

To fully realize the potential of the campus showdown format, either formal or informal, incentives must be designed to encourage college coaches to identify with the goals of player development and be willing to "buy in." While we have over a hundred Campus Showdowns, and more in the works, everyone involved in their promotion understands that volume is critical to really prime the junior development "pump." Universal ratings

would do wonders for the college system, as it would give more players opportunities and encouragement to keep playing competitively during the summer - whether they could afford to travel extensively, or whether they had to work and could only compete on weekends. In addition, continuing outreach from USTA player development leaders will do wonders for creating a closer working relationship with college coaches. Making more wildcards for appropriate level pro events for highly-rated college players will help create a feeling that we are all on the same team, as will including college coaches in more USTA training sessions. Continuing encouragement for sections to have active Collegiate Committees will also be necessary for building “common cause” at the local level.

### **Addendum to: Part I: The Need for a USTA/ITA Player Rating System**

Since the circulation of the first version of what is now **Part I: The Need for a USTA/ITA Player Rating System** began more than a year ago, after much discussion of it among many stakeholders, it is no small miracle that that we have more or less reached a consensus within the hierarchy of USTA and ITA leadership as to the desirability for a national “singles only” rating that would connect all players within the American competitive system.

Now that we have agreed in concept that a rating system is important, the next logical question is: which rating system? It is clear to me that many within the USTA will urge that only systems presently owned by the USTA should be considered.

Based on my several years of research, I would respectfully request that the USTA also enter into serious discussions with the Universal Tennis Rating corporation, and its founder, Dave Howell. Howell’s seven-year body of work with UTR is impressive.

Based on my understanding of UTR’s mission to improve American tennis, its commitment to innovation, its track record of its ratings and the performance of its level-based events at the local level, and its development of user-friendly features for the service it is designing for players and coaches, I believe that UTR’s product will far exceed *anything* that the USTA would come up with on its own, should it decide to try to duplicate, rather than assist, UTR. In short, UTR has already done much of the heavy lifting.

If the USTA has the foresight (and perhaps a bit of humility...) to see the work that UTR has done and to partner effectively with UTR at the early stages of this initiative, I believe it would yield a hundred fold return for the USTA, by growing the game faster, by making it possible to build a new culture of affordable local competition, and by developing elite competitors faster. In the process, it would not only save consumers time and money, but would also be another step forward toward Gordon Smith’s goal to reduce the USTA’s operating costs and salaries. It would go a long way toward establishing the USTA as a worthy steward of American tennis.

Consider the following:

#### **Information is Global, not just national**

The system will have to process results from across the spectrum internationally, not just the USTA or ITA. By itself, the breadth of the USTA’s data is not wide enough to create accurate “universal” ratings. Global reach and greater reliability will only be achieved by working cooperatively with the many competitive systems that exist (ITF, WTA, ATP, ITA, etc.).

### **Building Public Trust**

This system must be deserving of consumer trust. (See Appendix E: “**The Invention of Money**”: **This American Life**, **National Public Radio** to learn how the URV (Unit of Real Value) became the trusted new currency that helped to transform Brazil’s economic turnaround.

To establish this level of trust, users of the system would be better served if they knew that the rating system was not subject to influence from outside forces. The Federal Reserve Bank was intentionally given autonomy so that it could operate outside the political influence of the President or Congress. **Consumer Reports** is trusted because it functions outside the system. (Compare the public’s trust in Consumer Reports with its trust in Standard and Poor’s or Moody’s, especially once it was revealed that their ratings were compromised by their dependence on the good will of companies whose products they rated.)

### **Names Matter**

Many of you may have used the FlipCam, a video recorder the size of a digital camera that holds up to 2 hours of HD video. It has become almost an overnight sensation. Few know that it was a failure when marketed under a different name.

### **The Rating System must meet The “Big Idea” Threshold**

While the rating system must of course be accurate and produce reliable results, finding the perfect algorithm is not the greatest challenge that American tennis faces. The bigger challenge is finding a “big idea” that will change people’s behavior and catapult Jon Vegosen’s vision into reality. Once the public catches wind of a big idea (like the idea of freedom in the Middle East), it is hard to extinguish. As Oliver Wendell Holmes once said 150 years ago, “The mind, once expanded to the dimensions of larger ideas, never returns to its original size.”

President Vegosen’s “big picture” vision must make sense to everyone. **To work, we must have a clear strategy that engages all stakeholders.** This is more likely to happen if we all recognize that the benefit of *an enthusiastic public response* is far more important than who owns the system.

We want this first choice to herald a change that everyone wants to tell their friends about, that makes *everyone* want to climb on board, that motivates and inspires American kids to stick with tennis.

In short, this initiative has to meet certain criteria to insure that our efforts will make it possible to create a new wave of “*raving fans*,” not just “satisfied customers,” who can’t wait to tell all of their friends about their experience in “The Sport of Opportunity.” (See **Appendix D**, a letter from Orme Wilson, recently President of USTA Kentucky, who shares his thoughts on creating “raving fans” and raises questions as to the suitability of NTRP to meet this challenge.)

Such a “Big Idea” will be a dream to market - right in the USTA’s sweet spot!

### **“Cool” and Connectivity**

“Cool” is contagious. When my kids got their first apartments, they didn’t ask for our heirlooms - they had to have furniture from Ikea. They also wanted an iPad, and not a hand-me-down computer. Connectivity is contagious. Facebook started simply as a way to connect students with each other at Harvard University. Now it has a truly global reach. Facebook met the “big idea” threshold.

### **Let’s Put Our Time and Effort into Developing New “Apps” for this “Technology”**

Governments play a key role in making it possible for innovative products to succeed. Without government investment in a robust IT network, for instance, private sector innovations like the iPhone could never function at full throttle. Developers all over the world are now hard at work trying to develop applications for the iPhone and iPad.

### **Find the Tipping Point**

Instead of competing with UTR, the USTA could help UTR reach the tipping point as a truly “global” system, simply by providing for an easy transfer of scores. In return, it would have a willing partner that could provide USTA Player Development with exactly the information that it needs to “put a man on the moon.” By getting in on the ground floor as one of UTR’s facilitators, like the ITA, it could advise and help UTR tailor its data into forms that would be most helpful to USTA Player Development efforts. The success of the Apple Ipad caused a 'tipping point' in the formerly tiny tablet pc market to one that is now the fastest growing segment in the mobile device market. In previous years tablet pc's had been considered a to be small niche market and not very popular, the Ipad was able to capitalize on Apple's perceived "coolness", the consumer's trust in Apple, the current Apple Iphone ecosystem & all of it's existing apps.

Imagine the enthusiasm that could be generated from within the USTA volunteer base. Imagine the enthusiasm that would be generated by young kids and college players ever hungry to see where they stand against their peers. Think of the enthusiasm of parents when they realize their needs are finally being considered, or the enthusiasm of coaches when they know where their pupils stand level-wise.

Think of the relief it would be if USTA staff had to spend less time regulating and defending!

Judging from the responses I have gotten over the past year, UTR is contagious, and will earn “Raving” fans for the USTA and ITA in years to come.

### **Summary**

This White Paper is intended to give the reader a reasonable grasp of the issues surrounding a rating system. **Part II: Building a USTA/ITA Infrastructure of Local, Level-Based Tournaments** begins the process of brainstorming changes that can be made at the sectional and national level to design more “Open” tournaments that provide opportunities for level-based play. It is hoped that tournament organizers, towns, sectional and district committees, companies, academies, colleges, high schools, will all begin to come up with useful tournament formats that take advantage of the new “rating” technology.

## **Part I: Appendices**

### **APPENDIX A:**

#### **The Universal Tennis Rating**

##### **Disclaimer**

As I have referenced Universal Tennis Rating (UTR), its data, and its ideas often, let me state that I have no ties with it, financial or otherwise. Why then am I highlighting it?

UTR's creator, Dave Howell, is largely responsible for giving us a new lens, the Competitive Threshold (patented), through which to examine statistically the efficiency of our competitive system. Howell went beyond theory, and proved locally through the Tidewater (VA) Tennis Federation that a simple rating and level-based system of tournaments would increase participation over traditional USTA age-based formats, while at the same time producing a higher percentage of competitive encounters. His data demonstrates clearly how our system's inefficiencies, not our lack of player development efforts at the "micro" or "coaching" level, are holding U.S. tennis back.

Howell's insights can help us transform American tennis. His product, the Universal Tennis Rating, is simple, logical, with the means for judging the reliability of one's rating, and has captured people's interest and enthusiasm.

*On its own, UTR created an easy to use website and now offers services to thousands of junior players, academies, high school associations, college players, and hundreds of college coaches who can now take advantage of the UTR system.*

Without Howell's insights, I would not have had the analytic tools to reach many of the conclusions in this white paper. He's someone who is firmly committed to bettering American tennis. We should pay attention.

\* \* \*

UTR has 16 levels, and is calibrated down to the 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a point. It is now being tested by collegiate coaches through the ITA.

UTR ([www.universaltennis.com](http://www.universaltennis.com)) was started by Dave Howell, a teaching professional from Tidewater, VA. Among the players that he took to France were top juniors Jadon Phillips (University of New Mexico) and Jared Pinsky (Duke) and has had a few French players come and stay with him in the summer. Noting how well the French system worked, he modeled his initial rating system on the French system, and added the innovation of gender mixing. He also created a CT, or the Competitive Threshold ratio. With the assistance of local pros in Tidewater, VA, the Tidewater Tennis Federation (TTF) significantly increased participation by offering level-based tournaments based on his 1-12 levels of play ([www.ttftennis.com](http://www.ttftennis.com)). He designed tournament formats that were ideal for the 10-and-Under (and older) level of play through TTF. Winners and runners-

up were awarded TTF Ratings, which were originally 1-12, but later expanded it to the 16-point Universal Tennis Rating (“UTR”). *The data from the tournaments demonstrated that competitions based on rating levels instead of age-groups created greater parity - and hence more competitive - matches.*

Its 16-point scale is easier to understand than the French system, and can quite accurately rate all levels from QuickStart graduates to Federer and Nadal. UTR uses the top players like Federer and Nadal initially as “benchmarks”. The ratings of others essentially hang, like plumb lines for a carpenter, from these benchmarks, based on their results in relation to these “benchmarked” players. It does the same when crossing into another division of play, between which there is considerably less play. A known player who plays in both populations (let’s say, the junior who plays both ITF junior events and USTA junior events) is then used to create another benchmark, against which to measure the player who plays almost exclusively in, let’s say, only USTA junior events. After sufficient benchmarking, the algorithm is run again, and then the benchmarks are removed. Like ornaments hanging from a Christmas tree on every branch, all the lines are hanging from the point at the top of the branches, which are all held by the spine of the tree. No system can be perfect, but this approach creates reliable and accurate ratings.

Howell’s “Competitive Threshold” concept is so useful that we ought to consider it a “gift” to American tennis.

UTR has not been tested on a nation-wide scale until now, but it has been developed over many years at the local level.

When tennis legend Vic Braden learned about UTR, he called it a “no-brainer.”

UTR is a small company dedicated to improving the level of U.S. tennis. It has a number of people who have already expressed an interest in supporting it financially until it proves itself.

### **Doesn’t the USTA need to own the rating system?**

The answer is no. It is better for American tennis if it does not. Tennis is now international at almost every competitive level. The potential that UTR has to become a “global” rating that is usable and transferable to every country in the world makes it bigger than any one organization, including the ITA and the USTA.

This is arguably the most transformative opportunity that American competitive tennis has had since the tennis boom of the 1970’s. UTR will be able to respond to the needs of its users better if it is not seen as controlled by one governing body, such as the USTA. UTR has the potential to facilitate greater competitive efficiencies for all of its partners and users, especially the USTA and ITA.

### **How could UTR work with the ITA and USTA?**

Over time, it will become clear how UTR can best partner with the different competitive systems in the U.S. (college, junior, adult, high school, etc.)

Right now, UTR is well on its way to having a unified rating list of all players at the top of the competitive pyramid across the U.S., which I illustrated in Naples, FL in April 2011 to the USTA National Junior Competition Committee. All of UTR's prior efforts to rate a wide range of players have been considered accurate, but now that UTR is undertaking the processing of a much bigger data pool of results, the ITA and UTR will "measure twice and cut once." UTR will work with ITA coaches feedback in helping them not only insure its accuracy, but also to help make it as user friendly, and as responsive to the needs and interests of users as possible.

If not run by the USTA, UTR will be less costly, functioning more like a toll road that charges only its users, rather than a freeway that taxes every taxpayer, including those who don't drive a car. The USTA wins, and the consumer wins.

### **Interest in UTR is Growing... Shareholders Have Started to Vote**

UTR has gained considerable attention with ground-level users.

The "shareholders" in our competitive system with whom I have spoken - parents, educators, private coaches, players - respond enthusiastically when they learn about UTR. All have agreed that a well-designed rating system such as UTR would be a relief. They would welcome a shift away from the "hoop" system that they must all jump through to participate in the USTA system. They are surprised that it has taken this long to become a fully developed idea.

### **Texas High School Tennis ( [http://www.texastenniscoaches.com/TTCA\\_Partners.htm](http://www.texastenniscoaches.com/TTCA_Partners.htm) )**

The Texas High School Tennis association has 80,000 participants, and has the largest coaches convention of any tennis organization in the world. The Executive Director of the Texas Tennis Coaches Association, Steve Buck, has invited UTR to speak at their December, 2011 convention. He believes that this rating system could be ideal for their needs. Their high school competition is presently configured by divisions. These divisions do not reflect levels of play, but rather size of high schools, making it hard to put players of comparable levels together. Buck is enthusiastic that UTR could help them create a level-based tournament with different entry points that will allow players from any division to have a dream of winning the state championship. TTC's participation numbers are on the rise, while participation in USTA tournaments is on the decline. This is a trend worth paying attention to.

Nationally, there are 340,000 high school players. Most do not participate in many USTA age-based events because they are automatically matched against the top seeds and get eaten alive. By making group UTR packages available to teams and state associations at little cost, these players will be able to earn a UTR rating without paying costly USTA memberships. If UTR is also used by the USTA, these players are more likely to dip their toes into USTA level-based events.

### **The Response of the Collegiate Coaches to UTR**

UTR has already gained considerable momentum through its agreement with the ITA, which allows UTR to access ITA intercollegiate results. UTR will begin working with ITA coaches in the summer of 2011 to “play test” its initial ratings.

At the recent ITA Convention in December 2010, coaches were shown a comparison of the UTR number of the starting six of the four teams that were semifinalists in the 2010 NCAA Men’s Championships. Although Virginia was ranked #1 throughout the season, the eventual winner, USC, had a higher UTR total for its lineup than Virginia. Such data made it clear to coaches that what had perhaps been thought an “upset” might not really have been one. This illustration raised great interest among the coaches, as one might imagine, as coaches anticipated the increase in fan attention that might come from UTR comparisons of upcoming matches. A presentation of UTR’s capabilities was given and enthusiastically received by coaches from every division. Divisions II and III are particularly excited at the prospect of having their players rated “against the field.”

Like “tennisrecruiting.net,” which exists outside the USTA administration, and yet which we all recognize provides a valuable service to many thousands of juniors who compete in USTA events, UTR has so far built its business model on its ability to offer the many thousands of junior players the ability to judge themselves against the rosters of colleges in which they have an interest, and for convincing college coaches why they should recruit them. Likewise, college coaches have responded enthusiastically to the potential for using UTR ratings to evaluate talent that they don’t have the opportunity to see with limited budgets. They believe this will give them a far more accurate tool for judging players’ abilities, which will in turn let them sort through the hundreds of prospects that a coach must consider to remain competitive.

UTR is well along in the process of showcasing its “universal” rating for all players within the U.S., including ATP, WTA, Collegiate, and junior competitors.

While results for ITF, ATP, WTA, ITA and USTA can be obtained manually, help from the various associations greatly speeds up the process of data entry, and helps to keep costs down. While the USTA has many more layers of decision-making than the ITA, its assistance would speed up this process. I recommend that the USTA consider a low-cost R&D grant to UTR to facilitate the data transfer process between UTR and Active.com at the electronic level.

### **Junior Tennis Champions Center, IMG/Bollettieri’s, Canada and Argentina**

Other groups are enthusiastic, too. Ray Benton of The Junior Tennis Champions Center in College Park, MD has also expressed his support in presenting a level-based championship that would include the JTCC players, college players, and post-college players. IMG Bollettieri Academy has also begun a program. Representatives from Canada and Argentina have also expressed interest in using this system.

## Appendix B: Universal Tennis Rating flyer

### INTRODUCING

## UNIVERSAL™ TENNIS RATING SYSTEM

"THE MOST ACCURATE TENNIS PLAYER RATING SYSTEM IN THE WORLD"

### FEATURES

16 levels of play, highly accurate ratings, calculated to hundredths of a point. Ratings are based on actual match play results, without regard for age or gender.

In addition to players' abilities being calculated by their wins and losses, UT has added an outstanding innovation called "Competitive Threshold". CT indicates whether a match has reached a certain level of competitiveness (CT is reached if the loser wins more than half the number of games required to win the match, or 7 or more in a two-out-of-three set match).

Before the feature of "Competitive Threshold" was introduced by UT, ratings could not also be used to effectively rate just how competitive a tournament was, i.e., how many matches were really worth playing. UT's Competitive Threshold feature allows a more accurate calculation than one based simply on wins and losses.

Player data base with match play history includes professional, collegiate, and junior players worldwide. A convenient "head to head" feature allows you view results between rival players.

### BENEFITS FOR LOCAL AND SECTIONAL PLAYERS

More effective, efficient, and less costly tournaments. Helps create a competitive "pathway" in which players will "earn their way from one level to the next."

New players, including both older and younger juniors, can get started in tennis quickly and more successfully. Young and talented players are identified earlier, and challenged appropriately, often with less costly travel. This can include playing older juniors as well as adults. Post-collegiate local players stay in the game through tournaments, which target their level of play.

### BENEFITS FOR COLLEGE COACHES

To more easily identify prospects who will fit your program. Provides more comprehensive information than the "French System"

Preview match ups in your schedule. "Exhibition matches" will have more meaning for your players who are not in the top six.

Tailor Campus Showdowns to be more meaningful for all players

Provide feedback for UT about what features UT can add to make your job easier.

### BENEFITS FOR COLLEGE-BOUND JUNIORS

Help determine collegiate programs that will match your ability. Help in your selection of tournaments that best enhance your chances to raise your level of play.

Motivate you to play your best whether your matches are main draw or back draw.

### BENEFITS FOR USTA SECTIONS AND NATIONAL COACHES & PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

When players of all levels have UT ratings, level-based tournament formats can be designed that will yield the same high percentage of matches reached by the ITA, WTA, and ATP, perhaps even higher. For example, the ITA All American Championships have three levels of entry: Pre-Qualies, Qualies, and Main Draw.

Ratings can be used as part of the seeding equation, which will be especially helpful as so many players compete in and out of their age group. Innovative formats can be used to offset the current "lost year syndrome" so many juniors experience during their last year in the high school. Using UTR coaches can track players' progress over time.

## A LOCAL SUCCESS STORY

IN HAMPTON ROADS, VIRGINIA, THE TIDEWATER TENNIS FEDERATION CONDUCTED OVER 3700 TOURNAMENT MATCHES DURING A FIVE YEAR PERIOD, BASED ON "UNIVERSAL LEVELS OF PLAY". USING THE 7 GAMES/MATCH "COMPETITIVE THRESHOLD", THE TTF REALIZED A 50% COMPETITIVE RATIO OF MATCHES PLAYED AND INCREASED COMPETITIVE SINGLES PLAY IN HAMPTON ROADS BY 50%.

### DID YOU KNOW

- Chase Buchanan, after playing one season at Ohio State University, won all 7 matches at Kalamazoo without allowing an opponent to reach the UT "competitive threshold".
- Alex Domijan, UVA, has the highest UTR, 14.58, of all entering freshmen.
- UT fact: Did you know that the CT % of many sectional championships, which are based on age rather than level, is only 37%? For local grassroots USTA tournaments it is only 25%, one out of four matches are good match ups. Conversely, level-based systems like the ITA, WTA, and ATP tournaments reach the CT between 55-70% of the time. No wonder players get better faster in level-based systems!
- UT fact: Surprise! Last year's NCAA Champion USC's top six had a combined UT average (81.51) that was higher than #1 seed Virginia (80.79). Upset or not? USC's lineup included four Level 14s and two Level 13s. At the end of 2010 season there were over 40 ITA players with a rating of Level 14 or above, and over 100 players rated Level 13.
- David Holiner, University of Texas, lost in the round of 256 at Kalamazoo in 2009. He then went all the way through to the finals of the consolation, but only had to complete 4 matches. David received 5 defaults and 1 retired match before losing in the finals. Twelve % of all back draw matches at Kalamazoo have been defaults over the last 7 years.

COMING IN FEBRUARY,  
FREE ONLINE SUBSCRIPTION TO ALL ITA COACHES  
THROUGH JUNE 15, 2011.

FOR ANY QUESTION AND COMMENTS,  
CONTACT DAVE HOWELL AT [DAVE@UNIVERSALTENNIS.COM](mailto:dave@universaltennis.com)



UNIVERSALTENNIS  
RATING

[WWW.TEST.UNIVERSALTENNIS.COM](http://WWW.TEST.UNIVERSALTENNIS.COM)

### **Appendix C: Take It From a World-Class Player...**

Eric Butorac, the only ITA Division III player currently in the top 25 on the ATP Doubles Tour, talks about the differences between playing in the U.S. and France:

“I was in Paris for a few days in between tournaments in 2007. I was staying at a cheap hotel and had nowhere to practice for the weekend. Noticing a tennis club right in the center of the city, I went in and asked if there was anyone I could practice with, and if I could play at their club. I was quickly shooed away, being told that I was not a member and the courts were all full. Just before I was out the door, someone asked what my "classement" was (this is the French term for ranking) and I responded saying "minus 15." Literally all four people set their coffees down mid-sip. The club president came over to question my ranking and the guy in charge of court reservations started calling the best players in the club. I spent the next two days at the club practicing, eating and making some friends that I still keep in touch with today. By far the best moment of the weekend was after a practice session when a twelve year-old boy came over and said to me, "It was fun watching you practice. I have never met a minus 15."

My local club has hosted a money tournament since I was growing up. It is a huge local attraction for top players in the tri-state area. Since I have been on the tour, it has been very difficult for me to get back to play the event because it can draw up to a 128 player field. If this is the case, I have to set aside 3 days to play 2-3 matches a day to get through the tournament, even though only the final two or three matches I'd play would actually be competitive. If this same tournament were played in France, more players would play because they wouldn't worry that they would be embarrassed by playing a top player in the early rounds. The tournament would also draw more top players, like myself in this situation, because we would be allowed to start in the quarterfinals and only play matches against players similar to our ranking. As a result, we could make the tournament bigger, leading to greater prize money and overall a higher level. This would draw bigger crowds for the finals.

I find that these sorts of situations never arise in the United States, the reason being that because we have so many different ranking systems, it is impossible for us to really know what level we are. Who would win between a top 10 ITF junior age 16, a high school state champion, a top singles player of a college team or USTA ranked 5.5 player? Everyone is speaking a different language. In France, it is simple. Whether you are 9 or 90, if you play competitive tournaments you have a ranking that is on the same scale as the rest of the country.”

### **Appendix D:**

A letter from Orme (Sandy) Wilson, former President of USTA Kentucky, discussed the topic of building “Raving Fans” for our Player Development system. Wilson also raises questions on the suitability of NTRP for this task:

“U.S. competitive tennis faces formidable challenges. We can look at these from several different perspectives, including financial, socio-economic and operational. Bluntly put, the current American competitive tennis system is expensive, inconvenient and relatively unsuccessful if measured by the number of top-flight players generated compared to the resources expended and the size of our nation. In financial terms, the returns realized for the time and money invested are unacceptable.

From a *customer service* standpoint, moreover, the American competitive tennis system attains mediocrity but little more. Some “customers” – players, their families and their coaches – may be satisfied with the current system but few would proclaim it a resounding success. Fewer still would recommend the U.S. approach to player development and competitive tennis as a model for the entire world. Too often it costs hundreds of thousands of dollars to develop a tennis player capable of playing college tennis, not to mention one capable of competing professionally. Players and their families are stressed and excluded also by the time and travel demands of today’s PPR-based ranking systems. These costs in time and money pose insurmountable obstacles to substantial portions of our population, and U.S tennis loses out.

In addition, the NTRP rating system makes almost no one really happy. The system theoretically provides a way to judge and rate a given player’s skill level – as reflected in the NTRP’s written descriptions of the tennis skills associated with each level – but in reality it is an imprecise and inadequate method of evaluating a player’s relative ability to compete. In addition, as all of us recognize, some players and their teams frequently find ways to game the system and manipulate their ratings. To many players, the NTRP is a sore subject and a source of endless complaints.

In short, the competitive tennis system in the U.S. has a serious customer service challenge. In their immensely readable little book, *Raving Fans: A Revolutionary Approach to Customer Service* (William Morrow, 1993), business gurus Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles offer a compelling approach to tackling customer service problems and taking businesses to a higher level. Their core idea is as applicable to tennis as it is to insurance, retail sales or manufacturing. Blanchard and Bowles maintain that service often falls short simply because customers and businesses have resigned themselves to “satisfactory” rather than outstanding service. Since customers have low expectations, mere satisfaction becomes the goal. To reach the next level, Blanchard and Bowles urge businesses to transform their customers from being just “satisfied” into being “raving fans.” By listening carefully to customers, identifying and addressing their needs, adapting products and systems to meet those needs and by going the extra mile at every opportunity, businesses can go way beyond just “satisfying” their customers. Those raving fans in turn will become loyal, lasting customers and active, vocal promoters of

the business and its products. America's competitive tennis system must rework itself and must create *raving fans*.

### **Appendix E:**

#### **“The Invention of Money”: This American Life, National Public Radio, or “The Power of *The Right* ‘Big Idea’”**

#### **An object lesson for the USTA as it decides how to roll out its own challenge “to put a man on the moon in 10 years.”**

Brazil had a problem. For thirty years, it had a rate of 80% inflation *per month*. No one dared to invest in businesses because by the time it hit the market, the value of the finished product was less than the cost of the original materials.

Every succeeding President and Finance Minister had a new plan to fix it, but nothing worked. One President was even impeached after he froze everyone's bank accounts unconstitutionally. Another tried freezing prices, but people hid their cattle, hoping to sell them later when prices were no longer frozen. Since money had no consistent value, people were forced to “game the system” to survive.

Nothing worked. Finally, the economy went off a cliff.

A group of friends, who were then graduate students in economics, met periodically to discuss the flaws of each new President's plan. Later, these same four “amateurs” studied the country's economic woes closely over a 10-year period, and came up with an innovative plan to restore citizen's faith in their monetary system. Their plan, although never tested before on a country-wide scale, was grounded in real data, not hunches. It was buttressed by one daring new idea – the URV (Unit of Real Value).

In 1993, the new finance minister, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a sociologist who admitted that he knew very little about economics, approached these men and asked for their help. These four at first declined. Not believing that the government would ever have the political will to institute this plan, they declined. Cardozo was unrelenting and persuasive, so they finally agreed to help.

They were frank. They told Cardozo that their plan would not be a quick fix, that it would take years, but that it was Brazil's only chance for a “transformative” solution. The prospects for the country were so desperate that Cardozo said, “We'll back you to the precipice.”

The actual paper and coin currency of the nation, the cruzeiro, was in constant flux, of no consistent value, and therefore undependable. Since the cruzeiro had no predictable value in a wildly-inflationary economy, these “amateurs” had foreseen that their biggest challenge would be getting people to trust again that Brazilian money had real value.

They knew they couldn't rely on the discredited cruzeiro, so they designed instead a new electronic unit of money called the URV (Unit of Real Value) that would not circulate, but exist only electronically at first. This new almost fictional standard was created by arranging for businesses to pay their employees electronically in URVs and for people to pay their taxes electronically in URVs. Products were also priced in the new URVs.

Periodically the Central Bank would issue a release with the conversion rate from cruzeiros to URVs. People knew that they would need to pay, for example, 7 cruzeiros to buy a liter of milk that cost 1 URV. If they were paid 1000 URVs, it was reasonable to believe that 1 URV was a fair cost. Eventually, everyone began to trust the URV, since all the stores began to sell milk for 1 URV. While the URV itself existed only theoretically, the temporary fiction was necessary until people's perception of the value of money had been changed.

Almost miraculously, inflation went from 80% to 50%, and then 40% and lower. The plan from the beginning was not to replace the cruzeiro with paper URVs until it was clear that the people had accepted that the URV was *dependable, consistent, and reliable*. In short, they needed people to believe in it first before making the switch.

By 1994, the government was able to make the UVR its official currency. Since then, Brazil has gone from being an irrelevant economic basket case to being one of the most dynamic economies in the world. It is now the 8<sup>th</sup> strongest economy.

Cardozo, the Finance Minister, was later elected President twice as a result.

As these amateurs had insisted, Brazil did not rely on a discredited unit of currency to carry the mantle of an idea that had to capture the imagination of all Brazilians. There was nothing magical about the URV (it was actually "pegged" to the U.S. dollar) but the powerful idea made sense to everyone from the start. It successfully established the idea of a unit that holds its value relative to all parts of their financial system. They understood that *only* if the people of Brazil bought into this powerful idea and trusted it enough to base their actions on it, would they have any hope of solving the problems that were destroying their economy.

Since that time, Brazil has gone from country whose people believed that money had no value, to a country whose people now have faith that their money does have value.

Here is the object lesson for the USTA. The rating system that is chosen must be dynamic, without blemishes, and worthy of people's trust.

### **Appendix F: Learning From History**

W. Edwards was not recognized as a “prophet in his own land.”

Deming, an American expert in quality control in the 1950’s, preached to American manufacturers the importance of “constant and never-ending improvement.” He was largely ignored. American companies were prospering, and few saw any reason to change. Innovation in quality and efficiency was not a high priority. Style was.

At that time, “Made in Japan” was synonymous with poor quality. Hungry to be competitive globally, the Japanese took Deming’s advice to heart. His philosophy was adopted throughout the country. Quality became a national obsession. Sony, Toyota, Nissan, all began “kicking butt” by producing products of great quality. Mr. Deming eventually became honored as a national hero in Japan. As American companies found themselves “suddenly” (despite all his warnings) struggling, they began searching for ways to compete with Japan. Suddenly Mr. Deming’s words made sense to company presidents, and “constant and never-ending improvement” became the buzzword of American companies. Mr. Deming’s contributions were eventually recognized within the U.S.

Sadly, some lessons have to be learned again. When times got better again, American car manufacturers once again did not adapt to the changing market, continued to make too many varieties and relied on producing expensive SUV’s, without investing in extensive “hybrid” research. The rest is history. GM & Chrysler declared bankruptcy, and Ford was on the verge of it, and the American car manufacturers had to once again win back the public’s confidence in them.

U.S Car manufactures are now are on road to profitability and are gaining market share, because they restructured themselves and refocused their efforts on providing what their consumers need and want.

### **Moneyball**

Michael Lewis, the best-selling author of The Blind Side, Liar’s Poker, and most recently, The Big Short, wrote convincingly about “value-based investments.” He profiled the people in a variety of competitive systems, including Major League baseball, and in the financial markets, who had the passion to question systems, and discovered previously unrecognized inefficiencies. The few who recognized these small inefficiencies were able to gain a great advantage over those who did not make the effort.

**Moneyball** showed how the Billy Beane, General Manager of the Oakland Athletics - with the second lowest payroll in the major leagues - was able to create a playoff-level team by using statistical analysis of data that had never before been recognized as vital to winning games. The same information was available to everyone, but it took one amateur baseball “fan” to catch what others had missed. Curiously relevant to our discussion, players coming out of the collegiate baseball system were greatly undervalued. The big signing bonuses were customarily paid to the high school “phenoms” to turn pro. Beane’s access to the new data allowed him to capitalize on the inefficiencies

in the market to field a “bargain basement” line-up. Other teams eventually realized that they were missing something. The Boston Red Sox tried to hire Beane, but had to settle for Theo Epstein, who was one of the newly-converted. Epstein’s approach allowed the Boston Red Sox, historically ineffectual in getting value for its high salaries, to win its first World Series titles in a hundred years.

Dave Howell of UTR has created a pathway and provided us directions to help us overcome the ills of American tennis. **Can the USTA afford to ignore his insights?**