

**“When Are You Going to Get a Real Job?”:
An Experiential Sport Ethnography of Players’ Experiences
on the Men’s Pro Tennis Futures Tour**

**A Dissertation
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Degree
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to the participants who made this study possible. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences, insights, and thoughts with me. You allowed me to travel with you, practice with you, and delve into very personal aspects of your lives and careers while pursuing professional tennis. I wish all of you the very best in whatever direction your lives take you, and I value the lifelong friendships that have been forged.

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Abstract

In this experiential sport ethnography, I examined the experience of former NCAA college tennis players competing on the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Men's Pro Futures Tour, the entry level of professional tennis. Limited research has focused on players competing on this tour, especially former top-level NCAA players transitioning from collegiate to professional tennis. The contributions of ethnographic studies are gaining greater recognition in sport psychology literature, and I conducted a year-long experiential ethnography in which I entered the field as a participant and researcher. I gained access to Futures tournaments and players by participating in the qualifying rounds and collecting data through a combination of participant observation, field notes, informal conversations/interviews, and semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. Five overall themes emerged from the data—impact on life, uncertainty, mental discipline, support, and urgency—with sub-themes varying according to the three transitional periods players were experiencing. In the initial transition from college to professional tennis, players felt an urgency to play on the Futures Tour, found the experience to be life-defining, faced uncertainty about their success, understood the need to be self-reliant, and depended on the emotional support of others. In the second transitional period, which involved competing full-time on the Futures Tour, players felt an urgency to continue competing on the Tour, became consumed by the lifestyle, faced uncertainty about the many arrangements they had to make, realized they needed to develop consistency in their performance, and relied on structural support to remain on the tour. In the third transitional period, a time when players either had to move up to the next level of professional tennis or move on to other things, players felt an urgency to get off the Tour one way or another, found this period to be life-changing,

faced uncertainty over their future plans, needed to overcome adversity, and depended on material support. I used selections from an autoethnography of my research experience and a thematic analysis of the three transitional periods to capture the complexity of experience and psychological processes players went through as they transitioned to and competed on the Futures Tour.

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Chapter I

Introduction and Methodology

The decision to conduct an experiential sport ethnographic research project has its roots in my college tennis experience and my desire to better understand the power of the mind to affect athletic performance. This research journey included a year-long experiential sport ethnography, a methodology that facilitated my desire to better understand the experiences of former collegiate tennis players transitioning to the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Men's Pro Futures Tour (Futures Tour), the entry level of professional tennis. In this chapter, I have provided information about my own tennis background and experiences, the world of collegiate and professional tennis, as well as experiential sport ethnography. I also detail the methods that I used to collect and analyze a rich data set and explain how these results are presented. In order to help readers better understand this research journey, I have provided an autoethnographic account of my research process within chapter II, presenting a detailed description of and insight into my research experiences of traveling and competing on the Futures Tour. Within Chapter III, I provide a thematic analysis of the research data, using the words of the participants, and in Chapter IV, I include a summary of findings, practical implications, and future research directions.

The end purpose of this study was to provide sport psychology consultants, players, coaches, and anyone working with Futures players a more nuanced and complete understanding of various aspects, challenges, and factors of former college tennis players transitioning onto the men's Futures Tour after competing in college. I felt that this would best be accomplished through ethnographic methods as Krane and Baird (2005) state the possibilities of such research:

Acknowledging and examining multiple truths, or versions of reality, in sport and connecting the culture of sport to athletes' thoughts and behaviors will provide new avenues for consideration of applied issues. The various methodological and epistemological perspectives that may be employed in ethnography open vast new territory for applied sport psychology. (p. 91)

I hope that sport psychology consultants reading this study will not only be motivated to work with this population of athletes, but will also gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for what these players are experiencing as they try to build a career as professional tennis players. I hope that participants' experiences in this study will resonate with other college players thinking about competing on the Futures Tour, as well as current players learning from and feeling a certain connection to fellow players' experiences and situations. This research experience and study have helped me grow as a researcher, practitioner, athlete, and coach, and I hope that those who read this study will have an increased understanding and awareness of important psychological and socio-cultural aspects of former college tennis players continuing to pursue tennis at the entry level of men's professional tennis.

Background

Amidst a flurry of double faults and shattered confidence, I finished my NCAA college tennis career as a humiliated athlete searching for answers. Playing in a professional tennis tournament at any level was the furthest thing from my mind as I just hoped to be able to once again step on a tennis court and not be consumed by fear, panic, and paralyzing performance anxiety whenever I tried to serve (Jensen & Fisher, 2012). After college, I took a job as an assistant college coach while still working on rebuilding my own game and confidence. It was a

long road back to tournament tennis; however, I persevered and competed again in United States Tennis Association (USTA) men's open tournaments, started studying mental training, earned a master's degree, and moved on to my doctoral studies in sport psychology. It was during my graduate studies that I found a renewed passion for the game that I had spent fifteen years of my life pursuing and was relieved, once again, to feel like a legitimate tennis player. I had a newfound respect for the power of the mind, the demands it takes to excel in sport, and a growing interest in athletes pursuing sport at the professional level.

Through my many contacts within the tennis community, I became acquainted with some former top-level collegiate tennis players competing on the Futures Tour. As I was grappling with my own identity as a tennis player, studying sport psychology, and practicing and interacting with these Futures players, I became increasingly interested in this specific population of athletes. I wondered what these players had experienced as they moved from college to professional tennis, what drove them to pursue tennis at the professional level, what challenges they faced, what types of support they received and from whom, how their identities shifted throughout their career, and what mental and psychological skills they needed to compete and progress on the Futures Tour.

During my own graduate studies, not only did I eventually regain the form that I once had on the tennis court, but I also felt that my game had progressed to the point that I could actually consider competing on the Futures Tour. I did not have huge aspirations for success, yet it was personally satisfying to feel that I could step out on the court and at least hold my own against some of the Futures players. While most of the players with whom I talked and those I interviewed during this year-long experiential sport ethnography had played Futures tournaments

during college and were already familiar with the Tour, I had not done so and was unaware of what the experience would be like. I had no real sense of what the atmosphere would feel like at a Futures tournament, what the experience of entering and playing qualifying rounds would entail, or even how to get started in the process.

The following account constructed from my reflexive journal (Goodall, Jr., 2000) details the first Futures event that I played during the summer of 2008, two years after my college tennis career had ended in shambles and a year before I would move across the country to begin my doctoral studies in sport psychology. At this point, I was not planning to research the experiences of Futures players, or conduct an in-depth year-long study of the Futures Tour or players competing on the Tour. However, I did keep a detailed reflexive journal of my experiences, something that I have done through every step of my tennis career. These journals have provided invaluable documentation of my experiences and have helped me to construct and re-construct scenes and dialogue from the 10 Futures tournaments that I have traveled to and competed in since the first one that I played. I include the following account to show my complete unfamiliarity with the Futures Tour and my feeling of being an outsider to the Futures Tour culture when I showed up and tried to play one of these tournaments. This account is re-written based off of my experiences as recorded in the reflexive journal that I kept at the time.

Summer 2008: Sacramento, California--I am coaching tennis for the summer in Pebble Beach, California, have been playing a number of USTA men's open tournaments, have had some success, and decide that this might be my best opportunity to play a Futures event, as there is a series of three Futures tournaments in northern California throughout the month of June. I go to the ITF website, read as much as I can about the entry process,

and realize that for unranked players, my best shot is to show up, sign in for the qualifying, and hope to get in.

I have a week off between tennis camps at Pebble Beach, so after seeing the first group of campers go home on a Thursday afternoon, I make the three-hour drive from Monterey to a tennis club just outside of Sacramento, just in time to sign in for the qualifying of the tournament which is only open from 4-6 p.m. This happens to be a \$15,000 tournament which means that the qualifying (qualies) draw will be 64, and I have no idea if I will get in or not. “Hi, I’m Jacob and I am here to sign in for the qualies.” “Ok, do you have an IPIN and are you a professional or amateur?” “Yes, I have an IPIN,” yet I hesitate before answering the rest of the question. I don’t really feel like a *professional* tennis player, so I start by answering “amateur,” when I am interrupted by the tournament director, “Are you done with college tennis or still playing?” “Yeah, I finished a couple of years ago,” I respond. “Well then you’re a professional now.” I turn red realizing that I should have known this—yet, somehow, I still do not consider myself to be a professional tennis player. This is my first time at a Futures event, and I have no idea what to expect or what the procedures are. I pay my \$40 in cash, get the receipt, and then am told by the tournament director, “The draw should be posted online and here at the club sometime after 8 p.m. so just check back then. If you don’t get in, then bring back your receipt and we’ll refund you the 40 bucks.”

I go out to the courts and start practicing my serve. I don’t know anybody to practice with, there isn’t a soul around the courts, so I hit a basket of serves by myself, and then hit against the wall for a few minutes. A 12-year-old kid comes up to me and

asks me if I am a professional player. This time I respond “yes,” and he asks me if I will autograph a tennis ball for him. “You know, I’m really just starting to play professional events so you probably don’t really want my autograph,” I respond, feeling silly signing an autograph when 15 minutes earlier I hadn’t even known that I was a pro player.

“Well, maybe one day you’ll be famous so I want to have your autograph.” “Okay,” I respond. I think to myself: *I’m 27 years old, I had a disastrous final season in college, and I’m playing a Futures event because it was on my list of things that I wanted to accomplish as a tennis player. I will never be a famous tennis player, but I’ll sign your ball if you want me to.* The kid has his tennis racket so I ask him if he wants to hit a few balls. His eyes light up and we hit for about 25 minutes. I can tell that this is the highlight of his week, and he is going to run home and tell his parents, friends, and everyone that he got to hit with a pro tennis player. I may not be the next Andre Agassi or Andy Roddick, but I made this kid’s night and I feel good about that.

By the time I pick up the balls, it is 7:30 and the draw has already been posted. I scan the 64 names and don’t see my name until the bottom of the list where I am listed as one of the alternates. I feel a pit in my stomach realizing that I have just missed out on getting in by one spot, and that I had made the drive, paid for a hotel, and went to all the effort for nothing. I do have one more shot at getting in as I can sign in the next morning at 8 a.m. as an alternate and hope that someone will not show up for their match. It’s an outside shot but at least it gives me some hope.

I show up the next morning by 7:30 hoping to be the first alternate to sign in. There are three or four of us who sign in, and after 8:00 a.m. the tournament director

pulls our names out of a hat to determine the order of priority for alternates. I figure that I have a shot if I am one of the first names drawn, but that my chances of getting in go way down after that. To my surprise, I am the first name drawn which means that if any player doesn't show up, then I will get his spot. The first 8 matches go on at 9 a.m. and all of the players show up for them. The next round of matches goes on at 10:30 a.m. and, again, all players show up. At this point I feel I don't have much chance of getting in. *Why would somebody sign in for a professional tournament and then not show up, unless they got injured or were sick the next day.* I keep telling myself that I will probably not get in, yet hope that somehow I will still get to play. The next matches go on at 12:00 p.m. I have been sitting and waiting all morning watching tennis. I don't have high hopes, so I'm surprised when I hear my name called around 12:30 to report to the tournament desk: "Mr. Jensen, we have a player who hasn't shown up for his 12:00 match, so we are going to put you in his place." I walk out onto the court feeling nervous and unprepared, yet excited to be playing in a Futures event. I don't know if I will ever play in another one—yet, at least I can say that I played in one professional event and can experience what it is like.

My opponent's shots come zipping off his racket, and I realize that I have entered a higher level of competition than what I am accustomed to. I had been playing some USTA men's open tournaments where I had played some very good players, but I hadn't played anybody with the power and accuracy of my opponent. I lose the first set quickly, but in the second set I start to feel a little bit more comfortable. I win a couple of games, and although I lose the match, I am excited that I have had the opportunity to play at this

level. I don't embarrass myself, I have fun, and I feel that I have at least experienced what the qualies are like at a Futures event.

After playing in that Futures event in 2008, I had no intention of playing any more tournaments at that level. However, after starting my doctoral studies and learning more about qualitative research, including ethnographic fieldwork, I kept coming back to the idea of conducting a study where I could not only interview former college players about their experiences of going from college tennis to the Futures Tour, but could also travel to, practice with, and compete against these players in order to experience alongside them what it means to compete on the Futures Tour, the entry level of professional tennis.

Later, as I continued my Ph.D. studies, I began my year-long experiential sport ethnography; during this time, I traveled to six Futures tournaments in the United States, competed in the qualifications, and gained access and insights into the world of professional tennis at this level. In addition to talking to, practicing with, and interacting with over 50 players, coaches, and officials during my time on tour, I carefully documented these experiences through field notes and a reflexive journal. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 participants in order to probe and gain more in-depth information about certain aspects of players' experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about competing on tour. The field work I conducted was exhausting, exhilarating, enlightening, and never dull.

In order for readers to better understand this ethnographic study and the overall context and environment of the Futures Tour, the following sections provide a brief history of professional tennis, the structure of the Futures Tour and its relationship to the other levels of

men's professional tennis, and the relationship of college tennis to professional tennis in the United States.

Brief History and Structure of Professional Tennis

Professional tennis has a fairly short history, although the game and its major championships have been popular for well over 100 years (Parsons, 1998). In 1926, the first professional tennis tour was organized. In these early days, once players turned professional and accepted money for tournaments and exhibitions, they could no longer compete in amateur tournaments, including all of the major championships, which were considered amateur tournaments. Amateur players were unable to accept prize money, yet typically received money and incentives indirectly in order to pay for their training, traveling expenses, and lifestyle. However, there were huge discrepancies in the amount of money that players received. Although the top tennis players in the world who were winning Wimbledon, the French Open, the US Open, and other smaller tournaments were technically considered amateurs, they were often referred to as "shamateurs" because of the widely held knowledge that all these top players were accepting money under the table (Collins, 1994).

In 1968, the distinction between amateur and professional was abandoned, and the game of tennis entered the "Open" era in which amateurs and professionals were finally allowed to compete together for the first time and where all could legally receive prize money. The Open era led to a surge in popularity of tennis in the United States and elsewhere, and as the game of tennis grew, there was the growing realization among the different governing bodies of tennis that there needed to be opportunities for former college players and top junior players to break into the ranks of professional tennis (Collins, 1994). While entry-level professional tennis

structures were developed for both males and females, providing them with opportunities to break into the higher levels of professional tennis, in the following section, I describe the evolution of the men's entry-level professional tennis circuit because of this study's focus on the experiences of male college tennis players competing on the men's Futures Tour.

International Tennis Federation Tennis Circuit

During the 1970's, the ITF began exploring options for how to structure a series of entry-level professional tournaments for players wanting to make it into the higher levels of professional tennis (ITF, 2011c). In 1976, the ITF and other various organizations governing professional tennis established a European and North American Satellite Circuit in order to provide tennis players the opportunity to earn ranking points and prize money. Since that time there has been a substantial increase in playing opportunities for entry-level professional tennis players. In 1990, the ITF took over full responsibility for the Satellite Circuits (the precursors to Futures tournaments), and at that time there were 31 Circuits offering total prize money of \$975,000 (ITF, 2011c). Since then, enormous growth in tournament opportunities and prize money has occurred.

In 1998, the ITF decided to restructure the entry-level tournaments for professional tennis players to provide even more opportunities for up and coming players (ITF, 2011c). The ITF decided to replace the Satellite Circuit, which had required that players compete in a series of tournaments for four or five consecutive weeks, with one-week Futures tournaments. When the changes were first implemented, there were still both Satellites and Futures being offered, but the Satellites were done away with, leaving Futures events as the starting point for those wanting to

play professional tennis. The Futures Tour allows flexibility in that players can play as few or as many tournaments as they want, without having to commit to an entire series.

Today, the ITF oversees the Futures Tour, which is the entry level of professional tennis and provides opportunities for players from around the world (ITF, 2011c). Crespo, Reid, Miley, and Atienza (2003) indicate that the Futures tournaments “typically fill the void between junior and elite level professional tennis and provide aspiring talents the opportunity to compete against experienced professionals or other developing players” (p. 5). Futures tournaments bring together promising young juniors, college and former college players, and professional players, all trying to make it in professional tennis. Crespo et al. (2003) highlight the importance of these Futures events as “they represent the first level of opportunity for professional players to acquire computer ranking points and successful performance facilitates a player’s movement up the competitive ladder” (p. 4). Players hope to move up to the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) sponsored Challenger Circuit tournaments and then to main ATP tour events, where players can earn additional points and significantly more prize money (ATP Tour, 2011a).

While the ITF oversees the Futures Tour, tournaments are typically organized by national tennis associations and must either be scheduled for at least three consecutive weeks with prize money of \$10,000 for each of those weeks or at least two consecutive weeks with \$15,000 in prize money for each tournament (ITF, 2011e). Although Futures events are sanctioned by the ITF, they are under the direction of the national tennis organization where the tournament is held, which is one reason why the quality of tournament directors, management, and venues varies for Futures tournaments held in different parts of the world.

The U.S.-based Futures tournaments are sanctioned by the ITF, but organized and run under the supervision and direction of the USTA as part of the USTA Pro Circuit. This Circuit offered 31 Futures tournaments for men and for women in 2011 and is sponsoring 32 Futures tournaments in 2012 (USTA, 2012a). These Futures tournaments are categorized based upon the amount of prize money that they award. The USTA Pro Futures Circuit is sponsoring twenty-two \$10,000 and ten \$15,000 Futures tournaments in 2012 with over half of the tournaments being held in the southeastern part of the United States (see Appendix A). The main draw of Futures events consists of 32 players in singles and 16 teams in doubles. The \$15,000 Futures tournaments offer a qualifying draw of 64, while the \$10,000 events offer a qualifying draw of either 64 or 128, with 8 qualifying spots available into the main draw. Main draw wild cards are offered to players (4 in singles and 2 in doubles), and wild cards are also awarded to players in the qualifying singles draws (11 wild cards for 128-player draws and 8 for 64-player draws) (ITF, 2011b). Wild cards are “included in the draw at the sole discretion of the sanctioning National Association” (ITF, 2011e), which typically means that for the USTA Pro Circuit events, wild cards are given to the top young U.S. players, or U.S. players coming back from injury or time away from the sport.

The next level of professional tournaments after the ITF Futures is the Challenger circuit, which is one tier below main tour ATP events that include the four major championships—the Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon, and US Open (ATP, 2011a). Challengers are not run by the ITF, but are under the direction of the ATP tour and national tennis organizations such as the USTA. The ATP Tour, ITF, and USTA are all separate organizations, although they work closely together to organize and run the different levels of professional tournaments. Only

players with ATP points can register for Challengers, although unranked Futures players can show up the night before the qualifying begins and can request a wild card. Challengers offer greater prize money (\$50,000-\$150,000) and greater opportunity to earn ATP points than do Futures tournaments (USTA, 2012a). Many Futures players try to get into Challenger qualifying, especially those that are conveniently located to their home base, and some of the participants have played in both Challenger qualies and main draws (see Appendix B for breakdown of prize money and ATP points for Futures and Challenger tournaments).

Entry process and IPIN. When I first played the qualifications of a Futures event in 2008, as an unranked player, my only chance was to show up the night before the qualifying started, sign in, and hope to get into the draw. Since that time, the ITF has gone to an electronic tournament entry system for all ranked and unranked players (ITF, 2011e). Players must not only register and pay for an IPIN membership and number (\$55 annual fee), but they must also enter and withdraw from all tournaments online using their IPIN. This registration system allows players to manage their tournament schedules and enter and/or withdraw from tournaments, as well as to see any current announcements such as a change of surface or location of a tournament. Even unranked players—those without a current ATP ranking—must use the IPIN to register for tournaments because they are put on a priority list for the qualifying draws or alternate lists based off of their national rankings (ITF, 2011e). Players with ATP ranking points are given priority when entering Futures events; however, every country has a list of the top 500 amateur and professional players for their country, and these rankings are used to determine acceptance and placement on alternate lists for Futures events after those players with ATP points (USTA, 2012a).

Importance of ATP ranking points. Players on the Futures Tour often go on the road for weeks and even months at a time, traveling from city to city in hopes of making it through the qualifying rounds to the main draw of the Futures events where valuable ATP ranking points are at stake (ITF, 2011e). Some players focus on singles, while others gravitate more towards doubles where they have success and a more realistic chance of earning ranking points and prize money and inching their way up the hierarchy of professional tennis to Challenger and ATP tournaments. In order for players to earn an ATP ranking point, they must reach the round of 16 in singles and the semi-finals in doubles of any \$10,000 or \$15,000 Futures tournament (ITF, 2011e). Earning an ATP point is a very important step for players because it means that they have a much better chance of gaining direct acceptance into the main draw of a Futures event, and even if they do have to play the qualies, then they have a good chance of being seeded and, therefore, not having to face higher seeded players until the later rounds of the qualies. Marks (2006) wrote about the importance and meaning of earning that first ATP point: “Getting your first ATP point is a really big deal. Once you get over this hump, you know you have a shot at making a living playing tennis. This is the ‘maybe I can make it’ phase” (p. 199).

A number of U.S. players that I interacted with throughout this study have travelled to other countries outside the U.S. to play Futures events with the hopes of earning an ATP point, where the competition may be less fierce than in the U.S., and where fewer players are willing to travel in order to earn that first ATP point. Although it may be a sacrifice at the time in terms of money and resources, if they can secure that first ATP point, then it opens doors and opportunities for them when they return to playing U.S.-based Futures and Challenger events.

Financial reality of Futures Tour. The top professional tennis players are highly paid athletes, with #1 ranked Novak Djokovic earning a record \$12,619,803 in prize money in 2011 (ATP, 2011b), while little prize money is offered in the Futures tournaments (USTA, 2012a) and expenses for Futures players far exceed their earnings (Frandji, 2011). Futures players make very little money and need outside funding or sponsorships to cover their expenses. The \$10,000 or \$15,000 in prize money for a Futures tournament is divided among top finishing players in the singles and double competition. For example, the winner of the singles in a \$10,000 U.S.-based Futures tournament would receive \$1300, and the winners of the doubles would each earn \$315. For a \$15,000 Futures tournament, the single winner would receive \$1950 and the doubles winners would each receive \$472.50 (USTA, 2012a). Such amounts would not be enough to cover simple travel expenses. Tournament organizers attempt to help players with expenses by providing housing for players in the main draw, typically with local club members having players stay in a guest room in their houses. Players competing in the qualifying rounds get no housing and no prize money at all, just the opportunity to get into the main draw of the tournament and have the opportunity to earn ATP points.

An example of one player competing full-time on the Futures Tour illustrates the difference between a player's expenses and his earnings. Futures player Patrick Frandji (2011) played 26 Futures tournaments in 2011 and finally earned his first ATP ranking points and estimated his yearly expenses at \$46,270, including his travel, equipment, and coaching expenses. His career earnings are \$2,053 (ATP, 2012), making it easy to see the huge financial debt placed on players breaking onto the Futures Tour.

Players competing on the ITF Futures Tour must be constantly trying to find ways to support themselves and to make it possible for them to travel on the tour. This is especially true for former U.S. collegiate players who typically have no backing or financial assistance from the USTA or any governing organization. It is not unusual at Futures events to see groups of players from other countries traveling and training together. The governments of many countries pay for young promising players to travel together with national coaches in order to compete in these tournaments. These players can remain amateur as long as it is only their expenses that are covered and they don't directly accept any prize money (ITF, 2011e). The players traveling with national teams and coaches seem to have a distinct advantage over former collegiate players who have to finance their own way, arrange their own practices and hitting partners, and typically cannot afford to have a coach travel with them. The USTA gives most of its coaching, training, and financial support to young American players, the majority of whom will never attend college and play collegiate tennis.

ITF Code of Conduct and other measures. The ITF is very concerned with unethical and illegal activity that takes place in pro tennis. As a result, they publish a yearly ITF Pro Circuit Code of Conduct “in order to maintain fair and reasonable standards of conduct by players and the organizers of the ITF Pro Circuit Tournaments and to protect their respective rights, the right of the public and the integrity of the Sport of Tennis” (ITF, 2011a). Such standards are important for professional tennis and help to establish the standards necessary for the sport.

In addition to its Code of Conduct, the ITF has also established other programs and protocols to deal with issues such as gambling, match fixing, doping, and other challenges facing

the game of tennis. The ITF (2011f) has established a Uniform Tennis Anti-Corruption Program designed to do the following:

The purpose of the Uniform Tennis Anti-Corruption Program is to (i) maintain the integrity of tennis, (ii) protect against any efforts to impact improperly the results of a match and (iii) establish a uniform rule and consistent scheme of enforcement and sanction applicable to all professional tennis Event and to all Governing Bodies.

The Uniform Tennis Anti-Corruption Program includes a detailed Anti-Doping Program and the newly established Tennis Integrity Unit (TIU), which details how to avoid and handle any threats of gambling or match fixing facing players, tournaments, coaches, and others involved in the professional ranks of the game.

When ITF Futures players log onto the ITF IPIN website to register for a tournament, they are immediately given the opportunity to read an announcement about the TIU and are given the opportunity to click on it to learn more before going on and searching or registering for tournaments. The ITF is clearly concerned with ensuring that all players are well informed and educated about the codes and programs that are in place.

Ethical challenges. Professional tennis players face ethical challenges related to their behavior on and off the court. Young (2009) has identified some of the critical ethical issues facing tennis today: “An athlete’s character has become increasingly of critical significance in tennis in light of recent extensive media coverage of allegations of unethical conduct that includes match fixing, gambling, abuse of officials, sexual misconduct, cheating and doping (p.

7). Although I did not come across all of these ethical challenges while competing on and researching the Futures Tour, I did see issues related to cheating and gamesmanship that arise on

tour, especially in the qualifying rounds as players must call their own lines and keep track of their own score. It was part of my ethical responsibility as player and researcher to be aware of the measures that the ITF is taking to combat these ethical challenges.

Cheating and unfair play. Cheating, unfair play, and various forms of gamesmanship are problems facing tennis at every level of the game, including the Futures Tour. As in junior tennis and most collegiate tennis outside of conference and NCAA championships, players competing in the qualifying rounds of Futures events are in charge of calling their own lines, their own score, and governing their own match (ITF, 2011e). Tennis is particularly vulnerable to cheating, and Casper (2006) in his research on junior tennis and cheating has identified the responsibility of tennis players during a match, “Once each player takes the court it is up to both competitors to enforce the rules of the game and abide by the code. This unique situation serves as an opportunity to examine sportsmanship, in particular cheating” (p. 20). Although ITF officials are present at the qualifying rounds of Futures tournaments, there are not enough to be present on each court, observe matches, and can be called to a specific court if a problem arises.

Drugs, gambling, and match-fixing. The ITF took full control of drug testing in tennis in 2007, which has led “to a unified tennis anti-doping programme applying across all tennis events” (ITF, 2011b). Although the number of players who have been banned because of drug use, both recreational as well as performance enhancing drugs, is relatively low, it is still a problem that faces tennis.

In January of 2011, I was playing in a Futures tournament in Plantation, Florida, where pro tennis player Odesnik made his return to professional tennis after having been banned from the game for a year after being caught carrying human growth hormone on his flight to Australia

in January of 2010 (ITF, 2011b) for the Australian Open. It was interesting to see the negative reaction of many players to Odesnik's return, and I heard many Futures players voicing their opinion that he should have served a lot longer penalty than one year. Many felt that the ITF should not have shortened his ban from the customary two years, and there was a lot of resentment and anger directed towards him as he made his return. Although I have nothing against Odesnik personally, I was happy to see such a negative attitude from fellow players regarding Odesnik's actions of transporting human growth hormone, which suggests that the majority of players on the tour are personally and morally against any type of performance enhancing drug use or distribution.

During my fieldwork, I never heard or saw any player discussing or using any type of performance enhancements or illegal drugs, although it was important for me to enter the field as educated as I could be so that if I had seen such behavior, I would have known the correct protocol to follow. In any case, tennis players have to be very careful about what they put into their body or on their body as a number of legal vitamins and products contain substances that are banned by the ITF. Kendrick, a player who competes regularly on the Challenger and ATP tours, was banned from playing on tour for one year for the substance méthylhexaneamine, a stimulant found in a product that he claims he took to deal with jetlag, and that there was no intent on his part to enhance performance (ITF, 2011d).

Another ethical issue currently facing all levels of professional tennis is gambling and the accompanying match-fixing. These issues came to the forefront in tennis a few years ago when Davydenko, a top ten player, was playing a match against a much lower ranked opponent. Although Davydenko won the first set of the match, bets rolled in for him to lose (10 times the

normal amount), despite being the much higher ranked player and in the lead. Davydenko was ahead in the third set, when he retired from the match with an injury, which raised many concerns about the match (Douglas, 2007). According to the ATP, “Betfair, an online betting exchange, notified the ATP that its security team had recognized irregular betting patterns. After the match, Betfair voided \$7 million in bets, the first time it had taken such a measure. It turned over its data to the ATP” (Drape, 2008). Although Davydenko was never found guilty of any wrong doing, after this incident, more than a dozen players came forward admitting that they had been asked to throw matches and offered large sums of money to do so (Drape, 2008).

For these reasons, the ITF has established the Tennis Integrity Unit (TIU) to more intensely monitor professional tennis tournaments for any suspicious behavior regarding gambling and match fixing. Etienne de Villiers, the former executive chairman of the ATP tour, stated, “We need to breed a culture that is less of a boys club, with players who don’t (want to) snitch on one another . . . and more about a collective culture of responsibility to a sport and business they care about” (cited in Douglas, 2007). According to the TIU, a player or anyone associated with a player, including coach, trainer, or family member, must report any suspicions of gambling or match fixing, whether they have been approached directly or have heard indirectly of any proposed gambling to the “TIU as soon as possible” (ITF, 2011f). Futures Tour events are much less likely to face issues related to gambling and match fixing because of the tour’s relatively low profile, but it is an issue facing professional tennis, and I had the ethical and social responsibility to report any information related to these issues to the TIU had I encountered them while on tour.

Professional Tennis vs. College Tennis

In this section, I address the role that college tennis plays in the development of professional players. The benefits of collegiate tennis for up and coming professional prospects has been debated in tennis for years and has recently come under discussion again by the USTA and other governing bodies of tennis (Robson, 2012). In their review of the changes that tennis experienced from 1960-1991, Galenson (1992) found that when tennis entered the Open era in 1968, making it possible for all tennis players to compete for money in tournaments, the majority of all professional tennis players played college tennis before turning pro. However, by the year 1991, “none of the top four players in the 1991 rankings had ever enrolled in college” (p. 138). As of February 2012, only one of the current top-50 ranked U.S. players, John Isner, had played college tennis, and he is the only player currently ranked in the top 150 ATP singles rankings who finished all four years of his eligibility (Isner, 2012).

A large part of this change in numbers of top professional players not playing college tennis has to do with the lucrative sponsorships now offered to top junior prospects at 17 and 18 years of age. When I was in college, I practiced at the same tennis club where 17-year-old Sam Querrey played. Querrey was one of the top junior players in the country and debated whether to turn pro or play college tennis. When the sponsorship offers started coming in, such as an almost half million dollar offer from a major clothing company, it became almost impossible for him to turn them down, and so Querrey decided to turn pro. While Querrey has been successful, rising to a ranking in the ATP top 25, the USTA is currently concerned with a whole generation of U.S. players who turned pro because of such sponsorship offers, never had much success at the pro level, and have now dropped out of professional tennis (Robson, 2012).

Part of the transition from college to professional tennis involves differences between a largely team approach to tennis in college in contrast to the very individual nature of professional tennis where players play singles and/or doubles. In NCAA Division I tennis, the fall season consists of tournaments in which players compete individually; however, spring season forms the bulk of the tennis year and involves mostly dual matches, in which two teams compete against each other. In Division I tennis, each team has six singles positions and three doubles teams, with players being able to play both singles and doubles. The three doubles matches are played first, and the team that wins two of the three matches wins the doubles point (doubles matches only count for one point in the scoring). The six singles players from one team then play the six from the other, with the #1 player from one team playing the #1 from the other team, and so on down with the six players. Hypothetically, this format allows the best player on one team to compete against the best player on the other team, although shifts in the line-up are not uncommon. One point is scored for each singles match victor and the team that wins four or more points, either with wins in the singles or a combination of wins in the singles and the doubles, wins the match. The tennis season culminates in conference championships and then the NCAA regional and national championships. The national championships consist of team competition for qualifying teams, and then individual championships in singles and doubles for qualifying individuals.

The majority of nationally ranked junior players in the United States attend college and play in such a format, while the top few typically bypass college and go directly to professional tennis. The best of those who attend college often want to continue on with tennis after college, and they then transition to the ITF Pro Futures Tour, the entry level of professional tennis.

However, players typically cannot make enough money there to support themselves and rely on support from others to continue competing on the tour and seek to earn ATP points that will help them to get to the next level of professional tennis (Marks, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Some research has focused on various aspects of professional tennis and the challenges facing professional tennis players (Defrancesco & Burke, 1997; Farrelly & Nettle, 2007; Geyer, 2010; Harwood, 2010); however, little research has explored different levels within professional tennis, especially its entry levels (Marks, 2010). No sport ethnographic research has been done on Futures-level players, including the specific population of former NCAA college tennis players who go on to play Futures tournaments in an attempt to make it to the upper levels of professional tennis. No experiential ethnographic study has studied Futures players' experiences through the lens of both participant and researcher. This lack of research leaves sport psychology consultants (SPCs), coaches, and players themselves with limited information about the psychological and socio-cultural aspects of life on the Futures Tour and limited understanding of the challenges former college tennis players face as they transition from college to the Futures Tour and then compete at this level of professional tennis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this experiential sport ethnography was to use the dual perspective of both participant and researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience of former collegiate male tennis players competing on the U.S.-based Men's Futures Tour. Such a methodology was used to gain a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of what former

college players experienced as they transitioned from college to professional tennis and competed on the Futures Tour.

Delimitations

The following were delimitations of the study:

1. Participants were former collegiate tennis players who played at least three semesters of college tennis and who were current or former competitors on the ITF Pro Futures Tour. Some participants chose to retire during the course of the study or had recently retired from playing professional tennis.
2. Participants were former male collegiate tennis players.
3. As the author, I was a researcher as well as competitor on the men's Futures Tour during the course of the ethnographic fieldwork.
4. Only the experiences of players, including the researcher, who competed in U.S.-based Futures events were examined, although a number of players had played in Futures tournaments in other parts of the world.

Limitations

The following were limitations of the study:

1. It may not be assumed that players who did not play college tennis during or prior to competing on the Futures Tour would have the same experiences as the participants in this study, who all played at least three semesters of collegiate tennis.
2. It cannot be assumed that the experiences of female tennis players competing on the women's Futures Tour are the same as male players competing on the men's tour.

3. Although some of the participants had competed in ITF Futures tournaments around the world, it cannot be assumed that the experiences of participants or the description of U.S.-based Futures events would look the same in other parts of the world or for other players.

Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions have been adopted for this dissertation:

Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP): The organization that represents the interests of male professional tennis players. The ATP organizes and runs the Challenger Circuit as well as the main tour events outside of the four major tournaments (ATP Tour, 2011a).

Athletic Career Transitions: “Career transitions are normative or non-normative turning phases in the course of an athletic career” (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009, p. 398).

Autoethnography: A type of ethnography “where the focus of the research is upon the researcher’s own experiences within a particular social context or environment of which they are a part” (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 283)

Cultural sport psychology (CSP): An approach to sport psychology that recognizes that practitioners and researchers “need to consider the multiple facets of culture to fully understand who people (or athletes) are, why they act the way they do, and what motives underlie their actions” (Blodgett, Yungblut, Schinke, & Hanrahan, 2009, p. 92).

Elite-level tennis player: Any player who has competed in national USTA tournaments or international ITF tournaments at the junior, collegiate, or professional level (USTA, 2011a).

Ethnography: A type of qualitative methodology and research methods that “are generally characterized by their focus on a particular group, or subculture, and the inseparable relationship

between individuals and their social context. They involve the collection and use of extremely ‘rich’ data, and depth of information” (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 194). Typically, ethnographers use a range of data collection methods, such as participant observation, field notes, and interviews.

Experiential Ethnography: A type of ethnographic study where the researcher is also a participant in the culture under study (Sands, 2002).

Flow: A state of being of optimal performance and functioning often referred to in sport as being in the “zone.” Flow is defined as “those moments that we feel truly alive and in tune with what we are doing” (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 5).

International Tennis Federation (ITF): The international governing body of tennis. It is responsible for the rules of tennis, code of conduct, the Davis and Fed Cup team events, as well as the four major championships. The ITF works closely with national tennis organizations such as the USTA and ATP tour (ITF, 2011c).

ITF Pro Futures Tour (referred to as Futures Tour): Tennis tour providing the entry-level tournaments for male and female tennis players. Futures tournaments are sanctioned by the ITF, but organized and run under the supervision and direction of national tennis organizations. These tournaments offer ranking points and prize money and serve as a launching pad for players breaking into professional tennis (ITF, 2011e).

Process Orientation: A term used to describe the mind-set of athletes and performers who remain focused on the process of improving, staying in the present, and placing greater emphasis on improvement rather than wins/losses (Cox, 2012).

Qualifications (qualies): The round of a Futures event held the weekend before the main draw. Futures qualies typically have a draw of either 64 or 128 with eight players earning a spot into the main draw (ITF, 2011e).

Reflexive Ethnography: A type of ethnographic study that includes both the experiences of the participant researcher as well as the participants being studied. Reflexive moments and insights of the researcher's own experiences in the field as participant researcher are included to help "illuminate the culture under study" (Ellis, 2004, p. 46; Sands, 2002).

Self-Confidence: In the sport psychology literature, commonly defined as "the belief that you [the athlete] can successfully perform a desired behavior" (Weinberg & Gould, 2011, p. 320).

Sport Psychology Consultant (SPC): Individuals who have "advanced training in both psychology and the sport sciences" (Weinberg & Gould, 2011, p. 7) who work with athletes, exercisers, and other performers on performance enhancement, life skills, and wellness interventions.

United States Tennis Association (USTA) Pro Circuit: The governing organization of tennis in the United States which sponsors a professional circuit consisting of ITF Pro Futures tournaments as well as ATP Challenger events (USTA, 2011a).

Wild-card: Placement in the draw awarded to a player at the tournament director's discretion (ITF, 2012).

Wild-card tournament: A tournament held before the qualifying and main draw of a Futures event where the winner is awarded a spot into the qualifying or main draw (ITF, 2012).

Methodology

My experiences of conducting an experiential sport ethnography are highlighted in this section, along with the evolving nature of ethnographic work and some of the complexities of doing this type of research. The following section details my positionality and my choice of research design in conducting an experiential sport ethnography. I describe how ethnography has been used within sport psychology and how it is used for this study. In this experiential sport ethnography, I tackle issues of how validity and generalizability look within experiential sport ethnography, and how I accessed the research field. I also describe my awareness of a cultural sport psychology perspective, my epistemological orientation, my process of data collection, analysis, and write-up, my sources of data, my commitment to recursive self-reflexivity throughout the research process, and my ethical and social responsibility as an ethnographer. Although I focused on the experience of participants through an experiential ethnographic lens, as a participant-observer researcher, I also included my personal journey as I competed on the Futures Tour alongside the participants, experiencing with them what it was like to travel and compete on the Tour. Within this section, I also explain how my research focus narrowed and became more defined after having spent a few months in the field.

Positionality

I now attempt to recognize, question, and interrogate my position as a White male researcher coming from an upper middle-class family, having participated in the “country club” sport of tennis, and now having entered the privileged position as an academic researcher. As a participant researcher for this ethnographic field work, as well as for future research studies that I will engage in, it has been (and will continue to be) essential for me not only to be aware of the

different roles that I hold, but also to be aware of the different positions of privilege that I find myself in. In many ways, I fit the same demographics as the majority of my participants; however, I also acknowledge that I was never nor will ever be at their same level on a tennis court. Unlike all of the participants, who started tennis between the ages of 4-8 years and started competing before age 10, I came to tournament tennis at the relatively late age of 15. Although I caught up to and surpassed many junior players because of my commitment and work ethic, I never could match up to the very best one or two players in the state and those junior players who were nationally ranked. I received scholarship offers to play at a number of NCAA Division I schools; however, I had no offers to powerhouse SEC or PAC 12 teams. I was never an All-American, I did not go to the NCAA championships, and I played my best college tennis my freshman year before bouncing around to three different schools after that. I ended my college eligibility not dreaming of competing on the Futures Tour, but with a bad case of the serving “yips” and a crisis of confidence on the tennis court (Jensen & Fisher, 2012). At that time, I could not imagine playing tournament tennis again let alone ITF professional events, and only through years of hard work and determination since college was I able to get to the point of competing on the Futures Tour.

I love tennis, and I would have loved to have made it as a professional tennis player; however, for me it was an accomplishment and privilege to even be on the same court with the participants in this study, most of whom were among the best junior and collegiate players in the country. For many years, the participants in this study had felt expectations from their families and the entire tennis community to have success in tennis and on the professional level. I never had any of these expectations for myself or from my family or the larger tennis community. I

decided long ago to pursue other more “secure” paths such as coaching and then academics because I saw a more stable and promising future in these endeavors.

I admire players like the participants who are willing to put themselves out there with little or no guarantee of success—yet who believe in themselves enough to pursue this difficult path. Although I entered the research field and competitive tennis excited to see how I could play and push myself to compete at a higher level, I quickly realized the difficulty of managing so many roles at once. My game did not improve, and I struggled with my form throughout the process; ultimately, I placed greater emphasis on my research interests than on my level of play. However, being a player still gave me access to players in a way that I would not have had if I had shown up only as a researcher. It provided me instant credibility, built an immediate rapport, and opened countless doors for me, which I describe in greater detail in chapter II. I do not feel older at 30 than I did at 25 years of age (the average age of the participants), but I have felt that I had to balance many obligations and demands on my time. I also have found myself increasingly motivated by my career goals and other interests, not unlike some of the participants with whom I interviewed.

As part of my positionality I also recognize that the ability to conduct this study and the ease of access that I had to the research field and participants, was in part due to the privileged position that I hold as a white male. In her benchmark article “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” McIntosh (1998) urged Whites and those of privileged positions not only to be aware of privilege, but also to consider all of the advantages that they take for granted by being in a privileged position. McIntosh wrote that “the silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity

incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects” (pp. 2-3). She invited all audiences of her work to consider the role of privilege that they hold at every level of their identity.

McIntosh’s (1998) words opened my eyes to the daily privileges that I often take for granted because I am White. As it specifically applies to this research study, I realize that I have never been treated unfairly at tennis tournaments or had opponents cheat me because of the color of my skin. I have never walked into a traditional upscale tennis or country club and been looked at with disdain. I have not been looked down upon or felt that I don’t belong in these settings because of the color of my skin. To my knowledge, I have never lost out on teaching, coaching, or consulting opportunities because of the color of my skin. I have never had my intelligence, ability to excel in higher education, or my tennis IQ questioned because of my skin color. I have never been worried about traveling to any part of the U.S. to play in tournaments because of the color of my skin. I could keep making similar statements like this for page after page; however, I think that I have highlighted some of the major privileges that I hold as a White tennis player researcher.

I further acknowledge the privilege I hold as a male, especially someone studying sport psychology, a field traditionally dominated by White males. Again, following the advice of McIntosh, I acknowledge that I have never had my authority questioned based on my gender. As far as I know, I have never been denied a chance to work with an athlete or team because of my gender. I have never had my knowledge of sport, specifically tennis, devalued or questioned because of my gender.

I also acknowledge the privileged position that I hold as a member of the academy, especially as I approach the position of receiving my Ph.D. Although I acknowledge this privileged position, when I am outside of university walls, this privileged position is not something that I flaunt or advertise. I purposely avoid telling people that I am a doctoral student and say that I am in school studying sport psychology. If people further question me, I acknowledge that I am in graduate school, and only when pressured or directly asked do I state that I am a Ph.D. candidate. There are a few reasons why I acknowledge but choose not to flaunt this particular position of privilege that I hold. When competing on the Futures Tour, I wanted potential opponents to view me first and foremost as a fellow competitor and player on tour. I was privileged and fortunate that I could throw on my adidas tennis clothes and shoes and fit right into the scene without anyone suspecting that I was anything but a player on the tour. I have kept myself in excellent shape, I take very good care of my body and health, and I look every bit the part of a “professional tennis player.” I privileged my tennis identity over that of doctoral student as I wanted participants and fellow Futures players seeing me first and foremost as a fellow player, especially when we were practicing or competing together.

I also acknowledge the privileged position over my participants as my time on the tour ends with a doctoral degree and multiple career options. I am a USPTA-certified tennis coach, I have college coaching experience, I have a master’s degree, and soon I will have a Ph.D. Although the majority of the participants in this study have a college degree, I talked to dozens of players on tour who did not finish their degree, or did not go to college, and have very little to fall back on if the pro tour doesn’t work out for them. I love the sport of tennis; however, this

study further opened my eyes to problems inherent in a sport still looking to break from its elitist past as a country club sport.

I also acknowledge the privileged position that I hold coming out of a middle- to upper-middle-class family. Without their emotional and financial support, I very likely would have never played the sport of tennis, let alone conducted this experiential sport ethnography. My time on the tour reminded me of the financial demands of pursuing tennis at every level. I would not be where I am today if I had not come from a family that was willing to pour tens of thousands of dollars into private lessons, tennis equipment, and travel costs. My college scholarship did not come close to covering the amount of money that my parents invested in my tennis career. I experienced firsthand the money pit that the Futures Tour can be as I have thousands of dollars on my credit cards that I need to pay off after having flown or driven to Futures tournaments over the past year. I continued to rely on support from my family as my mother flew to Florida with me for a series of Futures events this year, refusing to let me pay for the hotel, rental car, or gas. It is very difficult to pursue tennis at any level without financial as well as emotional support, which is further discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

Ethnography

Ethnographic studies have a rich history in the field of anthropology (Sands, 2002). Anthropologist Malinowski (1922), often considered one of the first ethnographers with his fieldwork studying the cultures of the Trobriand Islands, emphasized that “ethnography go beyond mere description through participation, listening, asking, and probing cultural meaning” (Sands, 2002, p. 12). Gratton and Jones (2010) defined ethnography in the following ways:

Ethnographies are generally characterized by their focus on a particular group, or subculture, and the inseparable relationship between individuals and their social context. They involve the collection and use of extremely “rich” data, and depth of information, often using several data collection methods, most notably observation, participant observation and in-depth interviews with key informants. (p. 194)

Increasingly, fields such as sport psychology have opened to additional qualitative methodologies such as ethnography and are realizing the contributions that these ethnographic studies can bring to the field.

Ethnographies are being valued and conducted in sport sociology and psychology because they provide valuable insights into the experiences of athletes and the sub-cultures of different sports (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Krane & Baird, 2005; Sands, 1995, 1999, 2002). Krane and Baird (2005) have emphasized the potential benefits that ethnographic research can bring to the field of applied sport psychology and have argued that “it is impossible to comprehend athletes’ mental states and behaviors without understanding the social norms and culture that encompass them,” and they “suggest employing ethnography to gain a comprehensive awareness of their [athletes’] experiences” (p. 88).

Experiential Sport Ethnography

Experiential ethnography is a specific type of ethnography in which researchers are also participants in the culture being studied. Sands (1995, 1999, 2002) has conducted experiential sport ethnographies of college sprinters, football players, and surfers where he not only studied these sporting populations but also became a member of these athlete communities, training,

competing, and studying alongside his teammates and participants. In describing experiential ethnography, Sands (2002) wrote:

“Experiential Ethnography” explores the nature of fieldwork when the ethnographer becomes the studied. Studying sport offers the ethnographer—if so inclined and sufficiently skilled to compete or perform with the athletes—an opportunity to become a participating member of the sport population The ethnographer’s experience is not the central focus of the ethnography; instead, it validates the experience and behavior of many or most cultural members. (p. xxvii)

In a similar way, Thorpe (2010) conducted a multi-year ethnographic study of snowboarders. She argued for the need for ethnography in sport research as it “offers an important methodological tool for gaining in-depth understanding of the unique cultural contexts within which extreme sports participants live, practice, and perform, as well as the behaviors, values, and experiences of cultural members” (p. 370). It is interesting to read her “array of (unapologetically) messy insights . . . more multifaceted, uneven, and somewhat fragmentary picture of the extreme sports experience” (p. 375). Although Thorpe didn’t use the term “experiential ethnography” in describing her work, I classify it as such as she traveled for two years competing as a snowboarder as well as researching and gaining access to the different snowboarding populations that she met from around the world.

Autoethnography

In order to invite the readers into my field work and experiences, I chose to write chapter II of this study as an autoethnography. Reed-Danahay (1997), an early and avid advocate for autoethnography, defines it as “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social

context. It is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography” (p. 9). Autoethnographers Ellis and Bochner (2005) call autoethnography a form of reflexive autoethnography “where the researcher’s life is actually studied along with other participants’ lives” (p. 47). Autoethnography allowed me to capture the complex nature of my role as participant researcher and the personal insights and growth that I experienced as both a player and researcher on the Futures Tour.

Sparkes (2002), who has conducted extensive research in sport contexts using autoethnography, writes that “autoethnographies can encourage acts of witnessing, empathy, and connection that extend beyond the self of the author and thereby contribute to sociological understanding” (p. 99). Using autoethnography allowed me to capture my experiences traveling as participant researcher on the tour, while also providing insights from other players. The experiences and insights provided in the autoethnography of Chapter II are further explored in the thematic analysis and the words of the participants themselves that are presented in Chapter III.

Reflexivity in Ethnography

Self-reflexivity is critically important for researchers doing ethnography, which is why I kept my reflexive journal and have attempted to be explicit about my own positionality throughout the process. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) commented that they see “the ethnographic project as humanly situated, always filtered through human eyes and human perception, and bearing both the limitations and strengths of human feelings” (p. 964). Lather (1986) has argued that “our best shot at present is to construct research designs that push us toward becoming vigorously self-aware” (p. 190). Speaking about the necessity of the ethnographer being self-reflexive throughout the research process, Noblit (1999) wrote, “If we

do not work against ourselves, work against our values and identities, then they always get in the way of our understanding someone else's point of view" (p. 7). Similarly, Pillow (2003) wrote that "reflexivity thus is often understood as involving an ongoing self-awareness during the research process which aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge within research in order to produce more accurate analyses of our research" (p. 178). In addition to my reflexive journal, I checked in with my research colleague and my dissertation advisor on a regular basis in an attempt to be "vigorously self-reflexive" throughout the research process.

Conducting an experiential sport ethnography allowed me the ability and flexibility to study the lives of others (e.g., participants on the Futures Tour), as well as to include my own experiences, insights, and reflections of competing and playing on the Tour, through my autoethnography that is presented in Chapter II. Bochner (2001) stated that "the projects we undertake related to other people's lives are inextricably connected to the meanings and values we are working through in our own lives" (p. 136). Sparkes (2002) has done extensive research in sport contexts using reflexive moments and believes that they "can encourage acts of witnessing, empathy, and connection that extend beyond the self of the author and thereby contribute to sociological understanding" (p. 99). An experiential sport ethnography allowed me to capture, document and recreate the intersection of various cultural, sociological, and psychological experiences of participants, including myself, competing on the Futures Tour.

Cultural Sport Psychology Perspective

A growing number of researchers and practitioners in sport psychology have recognized the importance of cultural sport psychology (CSP), which "employs preexisting sport psychology paradigms and concepts to examine cultural background" (Peters & Williams, 2009, p. 13). This

CSP perspective is crucial when studying athletes and their environments in order to “consider the dynamic social, cultural, and historical context within which participants practice, perform, and live” (Thorpe, 2010, p. 380). Blodgett, Yungblut, Schinke, and Hanrahan (2009) have identified the importance of cultural considerations and how they affect consulting work with athletes. They emphasize that it “becomes important to consider culture and its role in relation to who athletes are, why they pursue sport, and how they are motivated, for sport psychologists to work effectively within the client’s parameters” (p. 90).

Fisher, Roper, and Butryn (2009a) explain the importance of applying a cultural studies approach to the field of sport psychology: “A cultural studies of psychology approach to research show how the ways in which studying the social environment and its meaning become critical to understanding athletes’ sport experiences” (p. 26). Therefore, for this study it became very important to understand the social environment of U.S. based Futures events in order to better understand the experiences of participants. Fisher, Roper, and Butryn (2009b) also call for more sport psychology researchers and practitioners working within a CSP framework to be aware of the following responsibilities:

[A CSP perspective] address[es] who is resisting oppression in sport, who is resisting privilege (if any), in what ways and at what times, if athletes are even aware of their own oppression and privilege, why/why not/when, who it serves if they are not aware, and if they and sport psychology professionals are interested in taking action against their own oppression and privilege. An interrogation of the institution of sport—its embedded policies/politics/contributions to athlete exploitation and how/when it has influenced

athlete (racialized, gendered, classed) identities in terms of oppression, privilege and resistance—is also critical. (p. 108)

This awareness and responsibility is especially important for sport psychology researchers who are working directly within sport cultures such as the Futures Tour.

Sport psychology consultants, researchers, and other individuals interacting with athletes in cultural spaces (e.g., coaches, family members, and fellow athletes) must understand the varying nuances of individual sport cultures and consider individual athlete differences.

Ethnographic research methods align nicely with a CSP perspective as Krane and Baird (2005) have called for their greater use in sport psychology studies:

Considering that sport has its own culture and within that larger culture, each type of sport (e.g. rugby vs. ice hockey vs. cross-country running), as well as each individual sports team, has a unique culture, ethnography is well suited for investigating sports settings. (p. 88)

Epistemological Orientation

I entered the research field committed to an interpretivist and constructivist epistemological orientation. I believed in letting participants share with me what was most pertinent and salient to them about their experiences of competing on the Futures Tour. I engaged in hundreds of hours of participant observation and informal conversation, with the understanding that multiple truths and realities exist and anticipated that no two players would have exactly the same experiences or stories to share. Grbich (2007) explained that within constructivism/interpretivism:

Reality is viewed as socially and societally embedded and existing within the mind. This reality is fluid and changing and knowledge is constructed jointly in interaction by the researcher and the researched through consensus. Knowledge is subjective, constructed and based on the shared signs and symbols which are recognized by members of a culture. Multiple realities are presumed, with different people experiencing these differently. (p. 8)

Noblit (1999) discussed the importance of looking at what participants are sharing as knowledge is co-constructed between researcher and participant. He prefers using the words of participants in creating an ethnographic text: "I prefer emic ideas: Words that the people use to characterize their own lives. . . . While people use the emic terms in a matter-of-fact way, such terms give me purchase on the uniqueness and the wonder of their lives" (p. 12). I also believe that "knowledge is 'constructed' and always fallible (constructionist epistemology)," and I see data collection and analysis as more of a process of "knowledge construction/making" rather than of "knowledge discovery/collection" (Smith, 2010, pp. 95-96). I believe that this constructivist epistemological orientation was beneficial as I initially entered the research field, became more comfortable with doing field work, and interacted with participants on a day-to-day basis.

I believe that beginning with a constructivist emic approach allowed me to gather a great breadth of information which directed me to more specific areas that I wanted to know more about. As this research project evolved I chose to ask participants more specific questions about their experiences on the Futures Tour which provided me with a depth of information on certain aspects of their experiences. In addition, my extended time in the research field allowed me to

see and capture the complex intersection of socio-cultural, psychological, ethical, and historical aspects of participants' experiences on the Futures Tour as they interacted with mine.

Although I remained generally committed to an interpretivist/constructivist orientation in my ethnographic work, I realized the post-positivist tendencies of conducting semi-structured interviews with participants where I asked about and probed for specific aspects of their experiences competing on the Futures Tour. However, I felt that this shift in orientation was important as I wanted to know more specific information about how players' experiences supported and added to the previous literature on professional tennis players and some of the socio-cultural, psychological, and ethical considerations stemming from my review of tennis and accompanying sport studies literature. Although I shifted to a more post-positivist research design, I remained committed to inviting participants' own words and stories to be shared throughout the data collection and analysis process. As part of my semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C), I finished each interview with an open-ended question inviting participants to share anything else that they would like with me about their experiences on the Futures Tour.

Data Collection

I received IRB approval in April 2011 to conduct a pilot study on former collegiate tennis players competing on the Futures Tour. I had begun competing in Futures tournaments in October of 2009 and had traveled to and competed in five Futures tournaments between that time and March 2011. I had recorded my experiences and matches at these tournaments in a reflexive journal. When I entered the research field and began my pilot study in May of 2011, I already had a "general sense" of what I wanted to explore, yet I did not have carefully defined research

questions. I entered the field with the understanding that meanings, patterns, and further research questions would emerge as I engaged in participant observation and informal conversations, took detailed field notes, and continued my reflexive journaling.

Krane and Baird (2004) have emphasized the often “emergent nature” of the research design when doing ethnographic field work:

When beginning an ethnographic study, researchers may have a general sense of what they want to investigate, but precise research questions may not exist. Rather, the researcher enters the field with scholarly curiosity about a particular topic and begins observation with an open mind as to what might lead to more specific research questions. In other words, the design is emergent . . . develops as more knowledge is gained about the setting. (p. 91)

Upon completing my initial fieldwork for my pilot study, where I had seen what emerged from my experiences and data, I decided that I wanted to ask participants more specific questions. After further reviewing the existing literature on professional tennis and related topics, and in speaking with my doctoral advisor and dissertation committee, we determined that there were specific aspects of participants’ experiences on tour that I wanted to know more about. I wanted to ask questions and probe deeper into the beliefs and experiences of players regarding the transitional process of going from the team environment of college tennis to the individual nature of competing on the tour, the role that social support played in the lives of these participants, the psychological challenges and the mental skills necessary to be successful on tour.

Following my pilot study during the summer of 2011, I received IRB approval for some changes in my interview guide, and then I re-entered the research field in October 2011. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 participants between October 2011 and January 2012. At the time of the interviews participants were provided an explanation of the nature of the study, and each signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D) of which they were provided a copy. Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym in order to maintain confidentiality, with seven participants choosing their own pseudonym, and three asking me to choose one for them. I interviewed participants David, Carl, Jackson, Jim, and Kurt with whom I had already traveled, competed against, or met during my pilot study. I then used “snowball” sampling (Glesne, 2006) where I had David, my key gatekeeper, and another former player and current coach help identify and contact potential participants. I followed up with these contacts and scheduled interviews with Trent, Rick, Dean, Sam, and Troy (pseudonyms have been used to identify all participants). All interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

The gatekeeper. Sands (2002) emphasized the importance of an ethnographer finding a “gatekeeper” early in the ethnographic research process; I found a valuable gatekeeper in David, who facilitated my research throughout the study. Gratton and Jones (2010) have emphasized that the ethnographer should “find a ‘gatekeeper’, trusted by group members, who can then introduce you to other members” (p. 200). The following description constructed from my reflexive journal describes my first introduction to David, who became an invaluable gatekeeper for me throughout the research process and illustrates how our relationship developed over the course of my doctoral studies and ethnographic research project. Without his support and interest

in my study, the participants he introduced me to, and the spaces that he helped me access, my experiences in the field and this study would not have been the same. The following scenes are constructed from my reflexive journals that I kept even before officially beginning my ethnographic fieldwork.

January 2010. “Hey, Jacob, have you met David yet?” Chad, one of the other coaches at the Mountain Aces Tennis Academy where I coach and conduct sport psychology workshops with both junior and adult tennis players, asks me. “No, I haven’t but his serve looks pretty tough down there, doesn’t it,” I respond. David is about three courts down from where we are talking, and even from a distance I can not only see but hear the sound of the ball as it crisply comes off his racket. I can tell that he is consistently hitting his serve around 120 miles per hour with accuracy to each corner of the two service boxes. “Yeah, David plays almost full-time on the Futures Tour but when he is in between tournaments he comes here and trains. You guys should meet. Hey David, come down here for a minute,” Chad yells from across the bank of courts.

“Hey, man, I’m David. It’s good to meet you. Would you like to get a hit in?” “Sure,” I respond, thrilled to think that David is asking me to practice, “but I have to get to my Psychology of Coaching class by 3, so I can only hit for a half an hour or so...is that ok?” “Yeah, cool, I was just serving so it will be great to hit some more balls.” I grab a handful of balls and start bouncing my feet at the baseline. I have just recently started hitting and training more regularly and am even playing some USTA men’s open tournaments. Although I have been hitting with some pretty good guys, the speed and spin of their shots is nothing like David’s. I feed a ball to David and the shot comes back

with more spin and power than I have seen in a long time. Hitting with him requires my feet to move faster than they have moved for months, so I have to stay on my toes and be alert to keep up with the pace, depth, and accuracy of his shots.

Some of the other coaches begin to watch as many of them have not seen me hit before and are curious to see how I do against David. Fortunately, we are having some great rallies and the presence of others watching motivates me even more and I am fairly pleased with how well I keep up. The good news is that I feel like I could keep up with David in the rallies; the bad news is that when my half an hour is up I feel exhausted and beat up from the intensity of hitting with this caliber of player. “Thanks so much for hitting—hopefully, that wasn’t a waste of your time,” I respond in my normal self-deprecating way. “No, man, that was awesome; could you hit tomorrow morning?” *Tomorrow, tomorrow*, I try and think through my absurdly busy schedule of grad school, coaching, consulting, and everything else that I have going on. “Sure, sure tomorrow morning is great.” I have a meeting that I’m supposed to go to—however, this time I decide that I can miss it as I’m not going to turn down an opportunity to hit with this level of player.

David goes back out on tour again so I don’t see him again for a few months. When he gets back in town I get a text from him, “Hey Jake can you hit tomorrow?” *Jake—only my close friends call me Jake—so that is a good sign*, I think to myself and am excited that he’s willing to hit with me again. I still feel like I have a ways to go in order to challenge David, but I have been playing a lot more tennis, I have entered a number of tournaments, and I even won a match in the qualifying of a Futures

tournament in Little Rock, Arkansas. I feel like I am in a better position to practice with David and not have it be a waste of his time. We start hitting more regularly, I slowly start feeling more comfortable against his power and spin, and, at least, I feel like I am giving him a decent workout. Over the course of the next couple of years David would become my regular training partner when he was in town, and I would also see him at some of the tournaments where we would sometimes hit together and warm up for matches.

David became my key “gatekeeper,” or key contact in the field, as he has played consistently on the Futures Tour for the last three years and has many contacts with players on the tour that he knows from his college playing days. During my actual dissertation fieldwork, it was not unusual for David to go up to players that he knew and introduce me by saying, “Hey, this is my buddy Jake. He plays on the tour and is also doing his dissertation research on what it’s like out here for us on tour. You really should talk to him because you’ll actually learn a lot from his questions and thinking through some things.” While some players seemed more excited than others to talk with me, this approach never failed to land me a phone number and at least the verbal agreement to set up an interview. Thanks to David, I had no problem having many informal conversations and interviews with players as well as a number of hour-long semi-structured interviews with participants. David proved to be an invaluable gatekeeper throughout this whole research process. In return, I believe that I became a source of social support for him and someone that he could talk to and rely on as well.

Participants. The following is a brief description of myself and the 10 participants interviewed for this study (listed in the order I interviewed them). Pseudonyms have been used for all participants except for Jacob, the participant researcher.

Jacob (*participant researcher*). Age: 30; started tennis: age 7; started competing: age 14; college: played four years, graduated; current playing status: part-time competitor on Futures Tour.

David (*gatekeeper*). Age: 26; started tennis: age 4; started competing: age 7; college: played four years, graduated; current playing status: competing full-time Futures Tour.

Carl. Age: 22; started tennis: age 5; started competing: age 9; college: played four years, graduating May 2012, current playing status: returning to Futures Tour summer 2012.

Jim. Age: 26; started tennis: age 6; started competing: age 12; college: played four years, graduated; current playing status: returning to Futures Tour in summer 2012.

Jackson. Age: 31; started tennis: age 8; started competing: age 9; college: played four years, graduated; current playing status: competing full-time Futures Tour.

Kurt. Age: 26; started tennis: age 7; started competing: age 9; college: played four years, graduated; current playing status: no current plan to return to Futures Tour (coaching and managing tennis clubs).

Troy. Age: 25; started tennis: age 7; started competing: age 9; college: played four years, graduating summer 2012; current playing status: currently injured; planning to return to Futures and Challenger Tour in the fall of 2012.

Rick. Age: 24; started tennis: age 7; started competing: age 9; college: played four years, graduated; current playing status: no current plan to return to Futures or Challenger Tour.

Trent. Age: 20; started tennis: age 4; started competing: age 7; college: played 3 semesters; current playing status: currently playing full-time on Futures and Challenger Tours.

Dean. Age: 38; started tennis: age 5; started competing: age 7; college: played four years, graduated; current playing status: plays occasional professional event (mostly coaching).

Sam. Age: 22; started tennis: age 4-5; started competing: age 8; college: played four years, graduated; current playing status: no current plans to return to Futures Tour (applying to law school).

Participant demographics. All participants had played collegiate tennis at the Division I level for at least three semesters, had reached a high level of collegiate success (e.g. national ranking, All-American), and had played in U.S.-based Futures events. Participants represented four different nations, although all were based at least part-time out of the U.S. Some of these players had also traveled and played Futures events around the world, and some had also competed in Challenger events. Participants ranged in age from 20-38 years, with the average age of 25.5 years.

All participants mentioned starting tennis between the ages of 4-8 years with most starting competitive tennis by the age of 10 years. This early start in tennis is consistent with the sport socialization literature such as Côté's (1999) study of top Canadian junior athletes from middle class families, including one high level junior tennis player, who all started their sport by age 8 years. Three started by the age of 4 years with the average starting age among participants of 5.7 years.

Participants in this study all mentioned having at least one of their parents involved in tennis, similar to Côté's (1999) study where "parents were responsible for initially getting their

children interested in sport” (p. 401). Participants and siblings Rick and Trent both mentioned the importance of their father (who had also played professional tennis), as well as their mother who (was a very active USTA league player). Sam also mentioned that his father had played professional tennis. In addition, Kurt’s father was a tennis coach, Jackson’s father had coached him for a time, David’s father was a collegiate tennis player, Carl’s father was a strong USTA league player, and Jim’s uncle was a tennis coach. This is in line with Carlson’s (1988) study on elite Swedish tennis players who were almost all socialized into the game at an early age by family members.

Participants played their college tennis at six different Division I universities, including some of the top ranked men’s tennis programs in the country. All participants commented on working with top coaches in their development as tennis players. This is consistent with the developmental literature on the important role that coaches play in athlete development (Salmela & Moraes, 2003).

Due to the extended time of this study, participants’ playing situations changed over the course of the study. As of March 2011, Rick, Dean, Kurt, and Sam had decided to move on to coaching, graduate school, or other careers. Participants Jim and Carl are planning on playing the upcoming summer circuit 2012 and then re-evaluate if they want to continue to pursue professional tennis or move on to other careers. David, Jackson, and Trent are currently competing full-time on the Futures Tour, and Troy is currently not playing because of injury but plans on rejoining the tour full-time sometime in the fall of 2012. This relatively high dropout rate is consistent with Geyer’s (2010) study highlighting the relatively short careers of

professional tennis players, especially those at the Futures and Challenger level who are not bringing home much prize money.

Sources of Data

Throughout my fieldwork, I collected data in the form of participant observation, field notes, informal conversations and interviews, reflexive journals, and 10 semi-structured interviews with participants. I traveled to six Futures tournaments between June 2011 and January 2012, as well as used reflexive journals from five additional Futures tournaments that I had traveled to and competed in between October 2009 and March 2011. Participant observation (Krane & Baird, 2005) was an essential aspect of my data collection throughout the research process. The daily observation and interaction with participants provided me with key information that I recorded in a systematic and timely manner.

Field notes (see Appendix E) and a reflexive journal (see Appendix F) were key parts of my data collection, and I took 30 minutes every evening to write down and record what I had observed and experienced throughout the day. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) have stated that “fieldnotes provide a distinctive resource for preserving experience close to the moment of occurrence and, hence, for deepening reflection upon and understanding of those experiences” (p. 13). I kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process where I recorded my own playing experiences and interactions with players on the practice court and in matches. Goodall, Jr. (2000) stated that “where you write your fieldnotes, or what you compose them on, doesn’t have to follow a prescribed format. You write what you need to write, to record what you need to record, whenever, wherever, and however you can” (p. 119). The continual process of writing while in the field was essential in helping me to organize and make sense of my thoughts and

experiences. I kept a field notebook with me at all times in my tennis bag so that I could write at any moment while on the court, watching a match, or even having dinner with another player.

A large part of my fieldnotes focused on participant observation as I both observed and interacted with the participants on a daily basis. Krane and Baird (2005) have asserted that “participant observation provides an avenue for developing closeness with athletes, who would be more likely to disclose beliefs, opinions, or behaviors not ordinarily discussed or readily revealed in single interviews” (p. 104). I found that while some players were not willing to take the time to sit down and take part in a formal interview with me, they were happy to talk with me on an “informal” basis, and there was an honesty and spontaneity to these responses that was not always present in the more formal semi-structured interviews that I conducted.

As I went back out on tour in the fall of 2011, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 participants. Gratton and Jones (2010) have encouraged those doing sport ethnography to use both open-ended and semi-structured interviews in order to collect as much information and data as possible (p. 204). During my pilot study, I used more open-ended questions asking players to tell about their experiences of what it is like to be a player on the ITF Pro Futures Tour, and after my pilot work and further review of literature, I put together a semi-structured interview guide, inviting players to respond to more specific aspects of their experiences on tour. Although Smith (2010) characterized ethnographic interviewing as being more of an art than a science and cautioned against “using a highly structured format that can suppress storytelling” (p. 94), I felt that even while I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants, I was able to find a balance where I asked specific questions while at the same time tailoring the interview

to each individual and his unique situation. These semi-structured interviews allowed me to probe participants about certain aspects of their training, competing, and traveling on tour.

Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork, both for my pilot study in the summer of 2011 and when I re-entered the field in the fall of 2011, I remained open to any additional data source that would better inform me about the experiences of players on the Futures Tour. I looked at any additional forms of data, including media reports, player websites, newspaper articles, and social networking posts, which would help me to better understand participants' experiences. I often kept in contact with participants via text messages and Facebook posts. Gratton and Jones (2010) have suggested that when beginning an ethnographic study, "don't restrict yourself in the data that you collect—quite often it is a case of collecting as much data as you can. As your analysis of the data proceeds, you can become more selective in what you record" (p. 202). This was the case as I re-entered the field after my pilot study with more specific questions in mind.

Data Analysis

Throughout the ethnographic process, data analysis and writing often became part of the same process. As I wrote notes in my field journal and entries in my reflexive journal, it was impossible to not start seeing patterns of responses and experiences in my reflection on my data. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I analyzed and wrote as I went along, from the pilot study through the rest of my data collection process. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) have asserted that the process of writing can be part of the overall process of data analysis and encourage using "writing as a method of data analysis by using writing to think." (p. 970). What they share about writing resonated strongly with me as I have always used writing to sort out problems, categorize information, and even make decisions. Analyzing by writing throughout

the research process helped me to have a clearer sense of my feelings, choices, and decisions as a researcher. The process of writing helped me to categorize and organize my data into themes as I worked through the hundreds of pages of interview transcripts, field notes, and reflexive journal entries.

Noblit (1999), like Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), has seen writing as a part of analysis: “Writing is inextricably an act of making sense of some social and cultural scene” (p. 14). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) caution, however, that while the process of writing can be very powerful for the researcher, it can also be messy: “Writing is thinking, writing is analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery” (p. 967). This messy writing process was not intimidating to me; I found it to be therapeutic and insightful as I moved forward with writing my results. Chapter II is presented as an autoethnography of my personal experiences and time in the field and interaction with participants, while Chapter III presents a thematic structure representing participants’ experiences on the Futures Tour through different transitional periods of their careers.

Throughout my study, I tried to be transparent and open about my analytical choices and the directions that I took while producing the final written text. Following the completion of the 10 semi-structured interviews, I transcribed each interview verbatim, finding through the transcription process, a renewed appreciation for the depth of responses that participants shared with me. This transcription process allowed me important time to reflect on participants’ words and emotions. They not only answered my questions but also shared stories with me about their experiences as players on the Futures Tour. These stories helped their experiences come alive, and I thoroughly enjoyed conducting and then re-living each interview through the transcription

process. One participant, Dean, even called me on the phone the night after our interview because he had been thinking all day about what we had talked about and wanted to share additional funny and enlightening stories about certain traveling partners that he had on tour that he had not had time to share with me the night before.

Coding of data. In addition to the writing process, I engaged in multiple readings of my field notes, reflexive journals, and interview transcripts where I initially did descriptive or in-vivo coding (see Appendix G), paying particular attention to the words of my participants and the terms and meanings they assigned to their experiences and daily events on tour (Saldaña, 2009). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) have described the importance of coding: “Coding here is actually about going beyond the data, thinking creatively with the data, asking the data questions, and generating theories and frameworks” (p. 30). I followed the advice of Coffey and Atkinson where, after my first cycle of in-vivo coding, where I focused on the words of participants which stood out to me, I assigned sociologically constructed codes coming from the sport psychology and cultural sport psychology literature. These different levels of coding assisted me in organizing the data and seeing common patterns within participants’ responses and experiences.

After signing a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix H), a qualitative research colleague of mine who is familiar with coding and the sport of tennis also read and coded each semi-structured interview transcript, and we then compared themes. This proved to be extremely beneficial as she recognized similar codes as well as helped me not overlook key words and passages from the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I then met with my dissertation

advisor—who had also read the transcripts—who further challenged me to take my coding to the next level and look for deeper patterns and meanings within the data. She not only helped me to

recognize a deeper level of themes, yet also helped me to see how these themes and sub-themes were represented during different transitional periods of participants' lives. Although the level of themes became deeper as I spent more time with the data, participants' words remained essential to me throughout the process as they provided "thick description" (Glesne, 2006, p. 27) of their experiences.

Taxonomies and storyboarding. During the second cycle of coding, I used taxonomies and storyboarding (Locker & Kienzler, 2010) to help organize and further make sense of the data. These processes were essential given the depth of the data generated from my nearly year-long immersion in the research field. Grbich (2007) recommended the use of taxonomies "to provide categories so that you can compare data across interviews or observations" (p. 45). Taxonomies helped me to compare participants' experiences and responses across my different data sets. I also followed the recommendations of ethnographer Goodall, Jr. (2000) who recommended different writing processes such as storyboarding to decide which stories and what information to include in the ethnography. This process of storyboarding was essential in the analysis and writing stages as I had to make careful decisions about which participants' words to include, how to structure my autoethnography and organize the thematic structure within transitional periods of participants' lives. Throughout my data analysis, I followed the advice of Saldaña (2009) who encouraged researchers to look for "surges, epiphanies, and turning points" in the data as they have the potential to "significantly alter the perception and/or life course of the participant" (p. 175). The process of doing in-vivo and sociologically constructed coding, categorizing my data into taxonomies of daily events and patterns, writing field notes, analytic memos, reflexive journaling, and storyboarding all assisted in the production of the final text.

Trustworthiness. Following the recommendations of Krane and Baird (2005) and Sands (1995, 1999, 2002), I used the following measures to improve the trustworthiness of the data. As I conducted an experiential sport ethnography, I remained committed to spending considerable time in the research field so that I could observe, interact, and contact participants in the setting being studied. In addition, after my initial coding, I provided a research colleague of mine a copy of each interview transcript, which she read, and then discussed with me. This individual was not only familiar with qualitative interview-based studies, but she is also an accomplished tennis player, having competed as a high level junior player and holds a USTA national ranking. These conversations proved invaluable as I was able to talk over, share, and consider my coding choices with someone who was familiar with the interview transcripts and the sport of tennis. My research colleague was not afraid to provide alternative interpretations or invite me to consider different perspectives or emerging themes. To contribute to the trustworthiness of the data, triangulation of data was reached through the use of multiple data sources, participant observation, field notes, informal conversations, and semi-structured interviews and member checking (Glesne, 2006).

In addition, with new approaches to inquiry such as experiential sport ethnography, there is an increasing awareness by researchers that sometimes different criteria and terms need to be used to evaluate the worth of emerging qualitative methodologies. Terms such as “verisimilitude” are replacing more traditional terms such as “validity.” In speaking about validity in reflexive texts, Ellis and Bochner (2005) have argued, “validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible” (p. 750). Similarly, Sparkes (2002) contended that ethnographic texts

“are better judged by aesthetic standards, by their emotive force, by their capacity to engage readers emotionally, by their verisimilitude, and by their authenticity or integrity” (p. 204).

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) have argued against evaluating ethnography and other emerging qualitative methodologies using only the traditional concept of triangulation, where “the researcher deploys different methods—interviews, census data, documents, and the like—to ‘validate’ findings” (p. 962). Instead, they argue not for triangulation, but for the concept of crystallization when evaluating these emergent qualitative methodologies:

Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves. . . .

Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of “validity”; we feel how there is no single truth, and we see how texts validate themselves.

Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know.

Ingeniously we know there is always more to know. (p. 963)

“Crystallization,” “verisimilitude,” “naturalistic generalization” and similar terms provide a different vocabulary to use when evaluating the merits and research contributions of emergent ethnographic texts, such as is the case with experiential sport ethnography where I included both an autoethnography in chapter II, and a thematic analysis over different transitional periods presented in chapter III. Both chapters are intended to invite the reader to see and experience specific moments from my time and interactions with participants on the Futures Tour.

Using different terms to evaluate the validity and generalizability does not discount the need for rigor and consistency with this type of research. Lather (1986) argued that “researchers must be more systematic about establishing the trustworthiness of data” and that “we must

formulate self-corrective techniques that will check the credibility of our data” (p. 188). Lather has called for researchers to carefully check with participants to see if their words and positions have been captured, asking participants to give name to their experiences, situations, and cultural artifices, and encouraging the researcher to be critically self-reflexive and transparent throughout the research process. Lather has called this process “face validity” (p. 188), while Ellis and Bochner (2005) have referred to a similar process that they call “reliability checks”: “When other people are involved you might give them a chance to comment, add materials, change their minds, and offer their interpretations” (p. 751).

To that end, I provided each participant with a copy of the interview transcript from our interview and invited each to add to or make any changes to the document. Only one got back with me wanting to follow up and expand on certain comments that he had made. I also shared some of my pilot study with Carl, David, and Jackson, the participants that I spent the most time with in the field. Taking my interpretations and analysis back to participants through this form of member checking was important as all three participants responded, questioned, and eventually validated what I was writing. In one case, I removed part of the results from my study because that participant was not comfortable with my interpretation of what he had shared and did not believe that it accurately captured his perspective of the incident, so I worked with him to co-construct the experience in a way that accurately captured his and multiple angles of the situation. This type of validation was essential throughout my ethnographic fieldwork and data analysis.

In addition, generalizability—or the ability to apply results, findings, and conclusions to large populations—is often not necessarily the intent of an ethnographic study (Ellis, 2004).

Ellis and Bochner (2005) wrote that in reflexive texts, “generalizability is constantly being tested by readers as they determine if it speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know . . . and provides opportunities for the reader to have vicarious experiences of the things told” (p. 751). This is particularly true when evaluating the autoethnography that I include in addition to the thematic framework. Although there were patterns of themes that arose out of my semi-structured interviews and other data sources, I did not attempt to generalize the experiences of participants to all players on the Futures Tour.

While I focused on the experiences of former college players competing on tour, there is too great of variety in the background, culture, and experiences of players on the Futures Tour to generalize these patterns to all players or playing situations. However, I did feel that I reached saturation of data pertaining to certain themes and certain similarities of responses from the 10 participants that I interviewed and the experiences of former college players on tour. I hope that the findings from this study will touch a cord with certain readers and resonate with them in a powerful way. I hope that I have provided a descriptive, insightful and impactful account of the experiences of former collegiate players competing on the Futures Tour.

Ethical Challenges and Social Responsibility as Ethnographer

The concept of *social responsibility* is important in sport and the ethics of sport. DeSensi and Rosenberg (2010) state that “the concept of *social responsibility* is inextricably intertwined with one’s values, beliefs and actions. We are free to make certain choices, but must also be personally responsible for those choices and decisions” (p. 136). Throughout my fieldwork as both a participant and researcher, I felt the social responsibility to conduct myself as an athlete in a way that was consistent with my values and belief in fair play: calling lines fairly, avoiding

gamesmanship, and following the ITF's rules of conduct. In addition, I remained committed to being a socially responsible researcher, using that commitment to guide important choices about how I treated those whom I interviewed, what information I asked them about, and ultimately what information I included within the final ethnographic text.

Throughout my fieldwork, I became keenly aware of the challenges of being a participant researcher. Players sometimes shared information, personal philosophies, and thoughts with me that left me feeling angry and frustrated. I faced challenges upon immediately entering the field and traveling with Carl. We did not always agree on issues and had a sometimes difficult journey traveling and training together. I faced the ethical challenge of choosing what to share about my experiences and insights within this dissertation, including my experiences with Carl and others. I made the choice to travel alone or with family to subsequent tournaments because I made the decision that it was too risky as a researcher to also share a hotel room and car with a participant. I continued to interact closely with, practice alongside, and talk extensively with participants in the field; however, I chose to keep these interactions at the tournament sites, not while sharing a hotel room or car. I debated whether to share some of my struggles with Carl, and ultimately decided to, after receiving his permission to do so. I included some of the challenges of our time traveling, training, and playing together during the summer of 2011 because I felt it was important to show the complexity that players face when looking to find fellow players to travel with on tour. It is not as simple as throwing two players together who both want to play on the Futures Tour and have it work out and be a beneficial experience for all involved.

On the court, as I watched others participate in unethical and unsportsmanlike behavior, I had to reflexively look inward and, although critical of such behavior, realize that I am not immune to such behavior myself. For example, when competitive emotions arose, when frustrations boiled over because of unfair play, and when traveling and training partners wore on my nerves, it was not always easy to act in an ethically and socially responsible manner. DeSensi and Rosenberg (2010) have written that “social responsibility must be extended to all those within range of one’s sphere of influence by treating others with dignity, respect, and fairness” (p. 10). This was a particular challenge as a participant researcher where the participants had been or had the potential to be my opponent on the court. While in the field, I constantly reminded myself that I had an obligation to treat everyone with whom I interacted with the respect that they deserved, although I did not always feel that the respect was reciprocated. Interestingly, by my last few tournaments, I had actually become an important source of emotional support to a few of the participants, a responsibility that I accepted and ultimately appreciated in the end.

Part of my social responsibility as a participant and player was to maintain my fairness while at the same time playing at the highest possible level so that I could remain competitive with these players at the professional level. According to Lee and Cockman (1995), “fairplay and its related term ‘sportsmanship’ appear to refer to patterns of behavior in sport which are characterized by justice, equity, benevolence, and good manners while striving for athletic superiority” (p. 337). Ultimately, as a participant researcher, maintaining high standards of ethical behavior was far more important than my win/loss record.

From my time in the field, I came to better understand the ethical issues involved in my role as participant researcher. Young (2009) identified crucial components of ethical behavior:

The focus of ethics is on what we ought to do in a particular situation and how we ought to live our life in general. The fundamental ethical question is therefore “What should I do?” The answer to this question is often far from simple. It may involve individuals investing considerable time considering, soul-searching, researching and/or discussing issues. (p. 7)

This is why my reflexive journal, conversations with my research colleagues, and academic advisor helped me to work through issues and keep a balanced perspective.

Throughout this ethnographic research project, I based my behavior and research agenda on virtues such as “courage, co-cooperativeness, sympathy, honesty, justice, reliability, and the absence of vices such as cowardice, egoism, dishonesty and hubris” (McNamee, 2010, p. 7). As an athlete and ethnographer, it was not always easy to keep those “virtues” at the forefront of thought and action as it sometimes became difficult to not get caught up in the competitive moment and the “win at all costs” mentality often found in professional sport. However, throughout this research project, I kept in mind the words of DeSensi and Rosenberg (2010) that “winning and good ethical behavior, can and should be pursued seriously to ensure that victory is well deserved and noble” (p. 15).

Within this chapter, I have provided an introduction to the world of tennis and the Futures Tour, the purpose of this study, and the methodology used within this experiential sport ethnography. In the following chapter, I combine an autoethnography of some of my field experience from June 2011 to January 2012 with a review of relevant literature. The integration

of autoethnography with literature is intended to show the reader various aspects of former collegiate tennis players' experience competing on the Futures Tour and to make connections to previous research.

Chapter II

“No Man’s Land”¹: An Autoethnographic Account of the Futures Tour

In the following autoethnography, I intersperse personal experiences and insights of my time spent at Futures tournaments between June 2011 and January 2012 with my review of relevant literature related to the socio-cultural, psychological, and mental factors of professional tennis and elite-level tennis players. The autoethnography serves to invite the reader to experience scenes from the Futures tournaments as well as to make connections to the existing literature. Coakley (2009) has emphasized that “studies of the social worlds created around specific sports provide useful information about socialization processes and experiences” (p. 112). The autoethnography shows this socialization process as participants had changing and shifting identities while transitioning from college tennis to the Futures Tour, and then to competing full-time on tour, and then deciding to remain on or transition off of the Futures Tour for career or other reasons. The autoethnography also provides insights into the complex psychological processes that participants experienced while attempting to pursue tennis at the professional level.

Sands (2002) wrote that in doing sport ethnography, his “aim was to let the reader feel the experience of participation . . . and at the same time begin to know the culture that the experience is encased in” (p. 93). I now invite the reader to journey into the world of the Futures Tour, while at the same time seeing some of the challenges and hurdles of doing experiential sport ethnography. Smith and Sparkes (2010) wrote that in doing ethnography in sport the researcher must understand that “it calls upon them to act as a witness, to engage in the ethical task of

¹ “No man’s land” is the area on a tennis court between the base line and the service line where a player is most vulnerable; players caught in this area during a point often lose the point.

dialogue, and to listen and think not just about but with people” (p. 77). The following autoethnography is therefore my attempt to not just think “about,” but also “with” participants and fellow players on the Futures Tour and to invite the reader to do the same. The following autoethnography follow a chronological sequence of my experiences as both participant and researcher, combining insights gained from studying relevant literature, competing on the Futures Tour, and interacting with and interviewing participants.

Research on Futures Tour Players

As I entered the research field, I already had a sense of some of the challenges inherent in competing at the entry levels of professional tennis based on my own experiences as well as some of the existing literature. In describing his consulting work with a young professional male tennis player competing mostly in Challenger tournaments, Harwood (2010) emphasized that the challenges of playing professional tennis at the lower levels can “be both brutal and demoralizing for the self-employed player” (p. 8). He further added that the challenges are much greater than simply figuring out “the micro-level of a single competitive match” and that “at the macro-level of player growth and development, it is about dealing with the ‘hotel room and treadmill’ lifestyle of being a young professional and managing your ‘unfolding’ identity as an individual throughout this process” (p. 9).

Marks’ (2006) study of Futures and Challenger professional tennis players serves as a handbook or how-to guide for those considering playing on the Futures and Challenger Tours and provides useful information about what players need to know when competing on these tours. She includes sections on such topics as business, sponsorship, nutrition, and conditioning

and provides practical information about the many considerations that a young tennis pro must think about before heading out on the road:

Among other things, your travel schedule must be mapped out, travel arrangements made, and finances figured out. Your prize earning won't be able to cover your expenses for quite a while. Further, you must find partners with whom to travel, room, practice, and play doubles. And last, but not least, you even have to figure out when you will have the time for the more mundane aspects of traveling—such as doing your laundry. (p. 87)

While this information is useful, Marks' study is not an ethnography specifically focusing on the Futures Tour, does not focus specifically on former collegiate tennis players competing on the Futures Tour, does not look at particular transitions they face, and includes little in-depth exploration of the complex psychological, mental, and socio-cultural factors former collegiate tennis players face in various transitions they experience related to competing on the Futures Tour. Marks also admitted that when asking questions, she often "tried to pry direct answers out of players during interviews" (p. 189).

As an insider and as a participant on the Futures Tour, I had a very different experience interacting with and interviewing participants. I found players very willing to talk about their experiences and often sharing insights that would likely not have come out in a conversation with someone outside of the tennis world. My experience was similar to Sands' (2002) experience as an experiential ethnographer as he interacted as an insider with athletes in a specific sport:

People love to talk about themselves, about others, about their beliefs. The problem is more about when and how to turn off the faucet of cultural information that continually

flows. In reality, most will be appreciative of the chance to talk, or even grateful for the opportunity to lend their experience to the ethnographer's growing body of accumulated knowledge. (p. 114)

Most of those I talked with and the participants whom I interviewed seemed to enjoy talking about their experiences, and David, particularly, thanked me many times for helping him to talk through his goals and plans for succeeding on the Futures Tour.

Selections from Autoethnography

As I had already played in a number of Futures tournaments before entering the research field in the summer of 2011, I knew the importance of finding players to travel with in order to make it financially feasible as well as to have someone to train with, warm up with before matches, and help me network throughout the process. By spring 2011, David, in addition to being the "gatekeeper" for this research project, had also become a regular training partner and friend of mine. I no longer felt intimidated being on court with him and knew that I could hold my own against him and that we mutually helped each other out. I knew that I needed his support as I went out on tour, trying to meet players to talk to and interview for my study. I knew that I would be competing against players who were former collegiate All-Americans, nationally and internationally ranked juniors, and those whose tennis accolades far surpassed mine.

Mountain Aces Tennis Academy: Practice session, May 2011. I'm in another intense training session with David, and this time we are playing a practice set. I toss the ball up and hit an ace, 15-0. David's coach walks by, something that used to make me nervous, but now I block out the potential distraction. Next point I toss the ball up again and this time I hit another ace out

wide on the ad court side, my favorite serve, 30-0. Next point I toss the ball slightly behind my head in hopes of being able to generate a little bit more topspin and hit a perfect kick serve to the outside corner of the deuce court, the hardest serve to hit for most lefties, like myself. Three aces in a row. I had only done this a handful of times before. I go for a fourth ace in a row and hit a flat serve down the T on the ad side. It misses by an inch. I hit a decent second serve, but David crushes the return cross court. *No problem; it's still 40-15 and I'm in a great position.* I toss the ball up and hit another kick serve, to the outside box, but this time David is anticipating it and returns another clean winner. *Ok, 40-30, I'm not going to let this game get back even,* I tell myself emphatically. *Should I go for another big flat serve down the T, or go with my reliable slice serve out wide.* I decide to go with my percentage serve. I toss the ball up, reach up for the serve, and hit around the outside of the ball to generate slice. The ball hits the court and spins away from David. He gets his racket on it this time, not an ace that I hoped for, but the return is weak, and I put away the short forehand for a winner. I am up 4 games to 3 in the practice set; however, we have to stop because I have to run a sport psychology clinic for junior tennis players at 6 p.m., and I need a few minutes to change into some dry clothes and get ready for my presentation.

Before running off to change, I ask David if he is going to be going to play the Futures events in Florida in July that have just been added to the Futures schedule. I am hoping that he will be traveling to and playing in these two tournaments because I would really like to have someone to split a room with as well as someone with whom I can train and warm up with before matches as I begin work on my pilot study. "Well, actually, I wasn't going to play the two in Florida at all and just wait for the Midwestern swing, but Jason [a top junior at the club where

David and I train] called me the other day and wondered if I would travel with him to Florida so that he can play in the tournaments. Jason's dad is going to pay all of the travel expenses so I really couldn't turn that down." "No of course not," I respond although I am disappointed because now I don't know who I am going to room with, and it will be harder to have as much access to practicing and talking with David as I was hoping for. I also secretly wish that there was another junior player out there, like Jason, who is starting college tennis this fall, and whose parents would be willing to pay all of my travel expenses to travel with their son so that I would at least break even financially after weeks on the road.

As I walk to court 18 for my sport psych clinic, I am disappointed not to be traveling with David on this trip. Not only have we become training partners and friends, but I had also been counting on splitting some of the expenses with him. I understand why David is traveling with Jason as players competing on the Futures Tour must be constantly trying to find ways to support themselves and cover their expenses. Although Marks (2006) identified that Futures players' earnings will typically never meet expenses, little research has looked at players' efforts to raise money or find ways to finance their expenses while competing on the Futures Tour. This is a particular issue for former top collegiate players, like David, who rarely receive funding from their national tennis organizations because such money typically goes to promising young juniors who either turn professional while still juniors or who retain their "amateur" status as long as they only have their expenses covered and they do not directly accept any prize money (ITF, 2011e).

Travel Arrangements: May 2011. I drive home from practice wondering about my own situation and how I am going to afford or manage going out on the Futures Tour alone. That

evening, as I am studying for one of my comprehensive exams, my cell phone vibrates in my pocket, and I get it out to check my text messages. I'm relieved that a text has come in because I need a break from studying. "Hey Jacob! This is Carl, how are u? I saw u signed up for the Florida Futures and I was wondering if u go there by urself or what?" I haven't heard from Carl in about five years since I used to train with him when I was in college and he was a top level junior player. He had just finished his college eligibility, and although I assumed that he would be trying to play some ITF Futures events, I had lost contact with him. I read his text again reading between the lines to understand it to mean, "I really need someone to room and travel with in Florida, are you up for it?" It also occurs to me that Carl is only 22, which makes it much more difficult for him to rent a car and navigate all of the travel arrangements on his own.

Although I had been disappointed that David had made other arrangements, I realize that traveling with Carl could be just what I am looking for as I need someone to travel with while I'm out playing on the Futures Tour. Carl fits the description of the population that I am interested in studying, although he is just starting the process of traveling and competing on the Futures Tour, whereas someone like David has now been at it for a few years. I realize that it will be beneficial to get their different perspectives, insights, and feelings as I interact with various research participants at different stages of their career. I text Carl back that I also need someone to travel with, and we make arrangements for me to pick him up in Tampa on my way to Orlando and then we will room and travel together for a few weeks. As I am making detailed travel plans with Carl via text, I realize that I truly feel like a player on tour and a real participant on the Futures Tour. Carl doesn't even know that I'm heading out on tour to conduct research;

he texted me to see if I would travel and train with him as a fellow tennis player, and I decide to let him know about my research plans once we meet up in Florida.

Indian Harbor, Florida: Summer 2011. Although I haven't seen Carl in over four years, I have no problem picking him out of the crowd in the rental car center at the Orlando airport. Our plans have already changed once, as Carl gets a flight into Orlando, not Tampa, and I am just glad to have someone to travel and train with. The 17-year-old kid that I used to hit with has grown to 6'2" and his scrawny frame has filled out. "College tennis was the best experience of my life. I already miss it so much." These are some of the first words that Carl says to me after I pick him up at the airport on our way to Indian Harbor, the first Futures that we are headed to. "Yeah man, I love college tennis so much; I'm going to really miss it." I nod my head, wondering why Carl feels the need to repeat this multiple times as we get in the car. I know that part of it is a twinge of jealousy towards Carl as our collegiate tennis careers could not have ended any more differently. I finished my college tennis sitting on the sidelines, my confidence destroyed by the serving "yips," while Carl finished as a top ten nationally ranked player only losing a handful of matches all year. I am happy that Carl has had success, but I find myself becoming annoyed by his constant reminders of how wonderful his college experience was.

We drive to the hotel and then to the tournament site where we get in our first hitting on the clay. Indian Harbor is a beautiful swank tennis club with white picket fences surrounding the facility, an old colonial-style club house, and well-manicured green clay courts. Everything is immaculate, and Carl and I are welcomed by the tournament director and his staff. They welcome us to the tournament and direct us to a court where we can practice. We are ahead of the rush of players who will be coming in later in the day in time to sign in for the tournament

and we have a short but decent practice. I assumed that Carl would want to get a little bit more hitting in on the clay, especially since there aren't many clay courts where he lives to practice on; however, he says that he is fine and doesn't really want to hit again. We go back to the hotel to shower and get ready to go to dinner. While Carl is in the shower, I decide to get my daily stretching and core routine in.

"What are you doing?" Carl asks incredulously as he gets out of the shower, and I am in the midst of my fifth set of reverse crunches. "Well, you were showering so long that I decided to get my core work and stretching in," I respond. Carl has a shocked look on his face and responds, "Do you do that every night?" "Yeah, I try to get at least a good 20-30 minutes of stretching and core work in every evening. It has really helped me to maintain my flexibility and to keep my body feeling good." I am surprised that Carl doesn't seem to have a regular routine, but I have to admit that I am more diligent with taking care of my body at 30 than I was at 21. However, Carl was a good college player, is looking to break onto the tour, and so I assume that he would have a regular stretching and core routine. I wonder if Carl, who has so recently been training under the supervision and structure of a college coach and strength and conditioning program, is having a hard time working out with the same structure and intensity now that he is on his own. Research shows that it is not unusual for collegiate tennis players to have drops in their physical training when not in season or outside the structure of regular practice and workouts (Kovacs, Pritchett, Wickwire, Green, & Bishop, 2007).

This is one reason why it is interesting to travel with someone like Carl who is just out of college and starting his journey on the pro tour, versus David whom I train with regularly at home when he is in town and who has developed a very structured and disciplined training

program that works for him. What impresses me about David, who at 26 has been playing on the Futures Tour for three or four years, is that he is always looking for ways to improve and make his goals a reality. He has shared with me that more and more he carefully plans and manages his life and training: 'I am taking control of the way that I do things. And that has been the biggest thing for me, and I think that is why I ultimately will be successful.' In her research on professional tennis players, Marks (2006) found that "only a few manage to work their way out of the tennis dungeon permanently. The best players, besides winning, know how to plan strategically for the long haul, physically, emotionally, and financially" (p. 197). I am used to training and being around David who is a relative veteran of the tour and who seems to have many of the demands figured out pretty well. I find it interesting to contrast the maturity and knowledge that I see in how David goes about his preparation for tournaments, with Carl who is just starting to play in Futures events and appears to have a lot to figure out as he goes along and continues his journey.

As we are at dinner, Carl checks his i-phone to see if the draw has come out. The draw is out and Carl googles my opponent and sees who I am scheduled to play the next day—a young African-American player who is one of the top juniors in the country. I definitely see tennis getting more diverse although it is clearly still a country club, White-dominated sport (Coakley, 2009). However, I do see an increase in the number of Black players from the U.S. as well as other countries. In addition, these Futures tournaments have a very international flair with many players speaking Spanish, French, and Russian, and an increasing number of Asian players are traveling with national coaches and teams. I went through most of junior and college tennis playing against one or two African-American players, and now that I am playing Futures

tournaments, this is the third African-American player that I will have faced. One of the African-American players that I faced earlier in the year is another young up and coming player, Celestine, who comes from a lower income family but has received a full room-and board-scholarship to the USTA national training center in Boca Raton, Florida (Robertson, 2009). I see the USTA reaching out and providing funding to a greater number of racially diverse young players, which I believe is positive for the game.

As I am talking with Carl, I tell him that it's interesting that he is the third African-American player that I will be facing in a Futures tournament, which is very different from my previous experience. I tell Carl that I find it encouraging that more African Americans are playing tennis, to which he responds, "Yeah, but I don't think that there will ever be that many Black tennis players. You know they are physically so great but they just aren't as smart as we are and tennis is such a strategic game that they will never have that much success—that is why I like to play them." I sit there with my mouth hanging open, dumbfounded and not knowing how to respond. His comments validate everything that I have learned from sport sociology, including Ferber's (2007) position that "White supremacist suppositions of the past, rearticulating and churning out anew the very same constructions of Black masculinity so prevalent throughout American history and cultural expression" (p. 16) are very much alive today, especially in sport.

Despite the Futures Tour being more racially diverse, I have heard some racist comments from fellow Futures players, but nothing like what Carl said. In speaking of race and sport, Miller (1998) wrote that "progressive writers and educators must still regularly engage the persistent stereotypes concerning the 'natural' physical abilities of blacks, which are said to

explain the ‘dominance’ of African Americans in sports”(p. 123). Ferber (2007) wrote that “Black men continue to be reduced to their physical bodies and defined as inferior to White men” (p. 22), something that I hadn’t anticipated hearing from Carl or that directly from any other player on tour. I feel obligated to confront Carl; and after a heated argument, I realize that there are still many prevailing racist attitudes alive in sport and tennis.

What I try to get Carl to see is that he is part of the group of “supporters of the ‘natural physical superiority of Blacks’ premise” which actually gives “credibility to the notion that Blacks are intellectually inferior to Whites” (Sailes, 1991, p. 485). It reminds me of hearing about Al Campanis, an executive for the LA Dodgers, who appeared on the television program *Nightline* in 1987, and the host Ted Koppel asked him why there were no Black managers or general managers in Major League Baseball. Campanis replied that Blacks ““may not have some of the necessities to be . . . a field manager or perhaps a general manager”” (as cited in Sage, 2005, p. 271). However, over 20 years later, I do not expect to hear such a comment. It outrages me to hear Carl making similar comments regarding African Americans; I accuse him of being closed-minded and he responds by accusing me of being elitist and out of touch with reality. The argument strains our relationship, providing an unpleasant beginning to our traveling together.

Although I do not want to come across as superior to Carl, I don’t want to add to the problem of racism on the tour by pretending that I do not hear what I have actually heard. Winant (2000) argued that it is not enough to pretend that racism doesn’t exist, writing: “It is unlikely that attempts to address worldwide dilemmas of race and racism by ignoring or transcending these themes, for example by adopting a so-called colorblind or differentialist policies, will have much effect” (p. 182). Although shocking to me, Carl’s comments regarding

the physical superiority of Blacks are not as surprising as I originally thought considering the existing attitudes of mainstream society. *Sport Illustrated* conducted a study on why so few White athletes are pursuing more traditional sports and found that “one third of white males in the poll believe that blacks are more aggressive in sports, and nearly a third believe that blacks are simply bigger and stronger” (Price, 1997, p. 34). After his thorough review of research and literature in relation to African Americans in sport, Sammons (1994) spoke of the danger of these “scientific” attitudes regarding the physical superiority of certain races:

Only bad things can come from research into “racially” based sport performance. Let us call off the search and get about the business of addressing those things that will make a difference—namely identifying and attacking biases based on perceived difference.

(p. 271)

I try to shift my attitude from one of judgment to one of understanding. Unfortunately, despite an increasing number of African American tennis players, tennis remains a sport where racist attitudes continue. Douglas’s (2005) article on fans’ negative reactions over the years to the dominance of superstar sisters Venus and Serena Williams shows that, unfortunately, “tennis remains a White middle-class sport. The reaction toward the Williams family reveals the profound discomfort Whites experience when Blacks enter a predominantly white sociocultural space” (p. 275). Participant Jackson, who would later become my friend and training partner, is African American and got hooked on the sport when Arthur Ashe and Althea Gibson came to visit his Midwestern hometown. About 6 months later Jackson would share with me some of his experiences of playing a traditionally White sport like tennis as an African-American man:

I have faced a lot of racism in my day . . . some of the places I travelled by myself I was cheated, called the N word, and really victimized, and then when I moved to the South, I faced a little more racism and stuff.

Although my role on the Futures Tour was that of participant researcher and not sport psychology consultant (SPC), I still felt a responsibility to stand up against what I considered to be prevailing racist remarks and behavior on tour. Fisher, Butryn, and Roper (2003) stated that “sport psychology professionals can, in fact, situate themselves within the social climate of sport and society and work for change as opposed to remaining complicit (through the sin of omission) in the perpetuation of injustice” (p. 400). Despite not officially acting as a sport psychology professional while in the field, I made the ethical choice to include these details of my discussion with Carl because I felt that this sort of dialogue is important.

The next morning, Carl and I warm up and then I play my match. I play this young African-American player who not only has great physical ability on the court, but who also impresses me with how well he constructs points and thinks on the court. He is mature beyond his years, and on this day he is the much better player than I am. After my match, I go and watch Carl who is playing against a former top junior player in the U.S. who is now one of the top Division I collegiate players in the country., Carl plays this guy very tough and loses in a long three-set match. Although Carl loses, I am impressed with how he played against a very tough opponent. As we are driving to dinner after the match, Carl says to me, “I think that these couple of tournaments will be the last of my career if I don’t start winning some matches.” I am truly surprised at his words because I would have been energized, encouraged, and motivated to have played such a good player so close. In no way would I classify this as a bad loss and I tell Carl,

“You played really well today. You need to stick with it and give yourself some more time and see what happens. You’re just starting out and need to give it a little bit more time than just one match and a couple of tournaments.” “You sound like my dad who is always telling me that I can do it and that I should keep going for it,” Carl responds.

I am really surprised to hear Carl talking like this, and it is interesting to me that he is eight years younger than I am, at a very different point in his career, and is already having some of the same feelings and doubts that I am having. In his study on retired professional tennis players in Sweden, Stier (2007) found that players reported doubts about continuing to pursue tennis as a career as being “triggered by a combination of injuries, physical and psychological strain, stress, fear of career discontinuation, existential rumination, ‘saturation’, career stagnation, an eroding motivation, lack of focus, and marriage or parenthood” (p. 107). Although I am feeling some of these issues myself at 30 years of age, I am surprised that Carl is already making comments that these might be his last Futures tournaments. I am surprised that he is already contemplating the end of his tennis career, when he is obviously a very talented player and can have some success on the tour.

Innisbrook, Florida, Summer 2011. After Indian Harbor, we make the three-hour drive to Innisbrook resort outside of Tampa, Florida, for the next Futures tournament. There is also a wild card event being held before the qualies with the winner getting a spot in the main draw of the Innisbrook Futures. Some Futures tournaments hold wild card events which are typically much smaller than the qualies and give players another chance to make it into the main draw.

Unlike the qualies, where eight players can qualify for the main draw, it is only the winner of the wild card who gets a spot in the main draw. These wild card tournaments also give players like

Carl and me a chance to get some more match practice, and it is nice to practice and play matches on the same courts that will then be used for the qualies that start later in the week. We drive through the gates of the Innisbrook Golf and Tennis Resort and drive through the acres and acres of perfectly manicured golf greens and finally find the tennis courts. Although the facility is part of a swank resort, I am amazed at how much differently the clay courts play than those at Indian Harbor. They are much drier, and although I like how the ball bounces off of them, they become a dustbowl very quickly in the hot Florida sun. Carl and I have our customary short practice and then we head to the hotel to rest and then go to dinner.

Wild Card Tournament: Innisbrook, Florida, Summer 2011. It's just getting dark on a perfect summer evening in South Florida. The sun is just going down over the Innisbrook Golf and Tennis Resort, snow egrets fly majestically overhead, and the palm fronds are lightly moving, silhouetted against the last rays of sunlight of the evening. The dust has now settled on sixteen of the green clay tennis courts except for court #7 where two players are still battling it out for a spot in the quarterfinals of the Innisbrook Futures Wild Card tournament. One of the players is Carl. His opponent, Jackson, is ten years older and trying to make one last go of it on the tour at the relatively old tennis age of 31 (Galenson, 1992). Jackson is about ten years removed from college tennis, obtained a ranking of around 1,000 five years ago, and now has "been saving his pennies" for the opportunity to travel and play again on the tour. Jackson had beaten me in a close match earlier in the day, and although I had lost the match, it had been a fun match to play; the level of tennis was high, and there had been a lot of respect between the two of us. I feel like Jackson had been a fair opponent, and after the match he had been complimentary of my play.

Carl and Jackson are now in a third set with nothing between them. The tennis club is almost completely deserted except for these two players battling it out, one official, and me watching from the stands above. Part of me is still disappointed that I am not out playing Carl, and part of me is relieved that I am not having to play my practice and traveling partner. If I had to play Carl and lost, it would have been hard to go to dinner afterwards with him and sleep in the same hotel room. I should be cheering for Carl; I have known him for years, and we are practicing and traveling together. However, I find myself silently rooting for Jackson. I respect a fellow player, a little over 30 years old who still loves tennis and is trying to make a go at it on the tour even after years removed from college. Although at this time I know Carl better than Jackson, I feel that I can relate to Jackson on a more personal level. Carl is still so young, just starting his journey of professional tennis and is being financially supported by his parents. Rees, Ingledew, and Hardy (1999) argued how important tangible support is in tennis “given the excessive financial cost of pursuing a career on the tennis circuit” (p. 427). I am not resentful of Carl, yet I do respect Jackson, the veteran, the player who has been saving his money for years, only traveling to tournaments where he can find a Marriott hotel to stay in because his aunt works for the chain and can get him a good deal, and who is not afraid to keep going at it.

The contrast between the careers, experiences, and situations of these two players is particularly salient on this warm yet comfortable Florida evening, and I feel conflicting emotions as I watch these two guys continue their battle into the third set. Carl occasionally looks up to me for encouragement, yet I don’t give him what I am sure he is used to from his college buddies and teammates. Rees and Hardy (2004), in their study of social support and tennis players, speak of the benefits to many players of emotional and esteem support from others:

Players experiencing competition pressure were also helped to maintain flow and keep from feeling flat at low levels by the perception that they had someone to reinforce the positive, life morale, tell them they could do it, and instill them with confidence to deal with the pressure. (p. 333)

I feel that Carl is looking for this type of emotional and esteem support, yet I am not in the best position to provide it to him. I'm actually hoping that Jackson will come back and win the match although on this evening I can tell that youth is probably going to prevail against experience. Jackson had won the opening set, but I can see that his legs are beginning to tire a bit. Carl is also tired, yet his legs are ten years younger and he is just coming off his last year of college tennis where I know that he did a lot of running and played a lot of matches. Jackson fights hard in the third set but Carl pulls it out 6-3. I write in my field notes with a touch of disappointment, "On this evening youth prevails over experience."

"Did I play well," Carl asks me as we get to the car. "Yeah, I thought you played well and nice win. How are you feeling after three matches?" Although I had been cheering for Jackson, I am impressed that Carl pulled out three matches in one day, and I am happy to have him do well in the rest of the tournament. "I'm so sore and I'm cramping, what should I do?" I give him a banana, some Aleve that I have in my car, and tell him to drink and try to rehydrate. "What should I do; I feel so bad in my legs." I try to be as helpful as I can be, yet I am not a trainer and I really don't know what else to do. We go to dinner, he seems to be fine, and I try to help him as much as I can, although I am not really in the mood to be a caretaker. I am still annoyed about losing my match, sticking around and watching Carl beat Jackson doesn't do a lot to improve my mood, and now I just don't feel like taking care of anyone but myself.

While we are at dinner, Carl says to me, “I just don’t think that anybody can do this on their own. It’s just too hard. I miss college tennis, my family, I miss my girlfriend, and this is really difficult.” Although I don’t say it to him, I wonder how much longer Carl can stay out on tour, as I not only hear his words, but can feel the depth of his loneliness and his sense of isolation of being out on tour. Carl’s feelings support Marks’ (2006) findings that loneliness is a common feeling that many professional tennis players experience: “Time and time again, the problem most cited by players early on in their pro career was loneliness on the road. As many discovered you can be lonely even when surrounded by a lot of people” (p. 176). Carl seems lonely away from his family, friends, and college teammates, although I don’t feel this same loneliness. I am used to traveling alone, I have been removed from a college team environment for much longer than Carl, and I realize that I have lived away from my family and closest support structure for the majority of my adult life.

As I have focused on tennis throughout the course of my 20’s, I have had to deal with many issues regarding my age and focus on tennis. As I interacted more with Jackson, I found someone with whom I could relate to more in terms of where we are in life. He has had to deal with some of the same issues related to masculinity and what is considered appropriate for men who have reached thirty years of age or beyond in U.S. society as they are expected to be in leadership positions, starting to make a lot of money, or advancing in their careers (Coakley, 2009). Coakley (2009), a critical sport sociologist, found that boys, particularly those from a higher socio-economic class, “connected their sports participants with masculinity because playing sports, they said, taught them leadership skills, and being a leader was central to their definition of masculinity” (p. 328). However, Jackson is still pursuing the sport at age 31, and I

am able to take off for weeks at a time to travel on the tour because I have not followed the typical path of most of my friends and peers from my youth who are all married, have children, and have settled into careers. The majority of my high school and college friends fit the traditional mold of what a 30-year-old white male from an upper middle-class family is expected to be doing—settling down, starting a family, and making money. Some of this pressure is taken off my shoulders because at the end of this process, I will receive a Ph.D., which validates, at least in some people's eyes, my wanderings around and my nomadic lifestyle as ethnographer and tennis player.

Jackson and David, both resolute in staying on tour for as long as they can to pursue tennis dreams, make many people uncomfortable, even some close to them, with what they are doing. Jackson would later share with me that after deciding to play full-time on the tour, his support group decreased dramatically: "Basically, my circle shrunk down to just a couple of people from my mom to my girlfriend and that's about it." David, although appreciative of his parents' support, also shared with me that it's not always easy:

I mean my parents have been very supportive, but they haven't been ideal . . . I mean my dad's a doctor; he did the med school thing, you know I want to be in residency by this time and that sort of deal, but if I told my dad about process, and that my game is exactly where I want it to be at this time from a developmental standpoint, despite not winning a lot of singles matches last year, he would say to me "what the hell are you doing?"

Even Carl, at age 22, seems to feel some of the pressures that men often feel to have a successful job, earn a lot of money, and support a family (Messner, 2005). Although Carl won a number of quality matches during our time on the tour, which could have given him a lot of

confidence, a few weeks after finishing our travels, he posted on Facebook: “Plans for 2012, finish my double major, take the series seven test, get a real job and maybe study Computer Science as my third major :).” I wonder if the comment “get a real job” is in reference to playing tennis on the tour—which he may or may not perceive as being a legitimate career, or providing him the financial resources needed for the type of lifestyle that he envisions having. What is most striking to me, however, is that tennis is not mentioned at all in his Facebook posting.

Looking at Carl’s situation from a cultural sport perspective, I feel that I have a better understanding of his comments after learning a little more about his cultural background. While traveling with Carl he would repeatedly express his surprise at the fact that at 30 I wasn’t married and would often say to me “Jacob, come on man you really need to get a girlfriend and then get married.” Carl had certain beliefs about what a 30 year-old man should be doing, which included being married and having financial success. According to Kontos and Arguello (2009) “much of the Latin American belief system and social standing reflect male-dominated (i.e., ‘machismo’) sex roles and values” (p. 191) which might account for the pressure that Carl feels in terms of having a job where he could support himself and his girlfriend and which would allow him more upward mobility than he currently sees if he continues pursuing tennis.

Practice court with Jackson: Innisbrook Resort, Summer 2011. The next day as Carl is playing his quarterfinal match, I meet up with Jackson to get a practice session in. I am tired of practicing with Carl who has only one routine that he likes to do: Hit for 5-10 minutes, play one set, and that is it. That might be a routine that works for him, yet there are days when I need to hit more ground strokes, or work more on my volleys, and Carl’s routine is not always great for that. I have asked him to stay and practice some more, and he never wants to do anything

after we have played one set. So it is a welcome change to get the chance to be able to practice with someone else. Even though Jackson had beaten me, he is very interested in studying sport psychology and tells me that he would love to talk with me again. As Carl is playing his quarterfinal match, Jackson and I set up a practice session which gives us time to get some good hitting in as well as to have the chance to talk more about life on the tour.

Jackson and I take our first break from the hot summer Florida sun that is now scorching overhead. We are both dripping with sweat and take a minute to towel off and hydrate. There is a covered area with a couple of chairs and a drinking fountain between our court and the court next to us where two guys are battling it out in the quarterfinals of the Wild Card tournament. We watch the guys next to us for a few points only to see one player hit a serve that lands right on the service line and the returner calls the ball out. The ball is right on the line, which makes it a great serve, but the returner calls it out and moves back to the baseline for the next point. The server argues at the net and demands that the returner show him the mark. The returner walks slowly back up to the service line, looks around for a couple of seconds, and then chooses a mark that is clearly not from the same serve that had been struck minutes before. Jackson and I both stare at each other and Jackson whispers to me, "You sure see plenty of opportunities to see someone's real character playing out here." I just nod my head in agreement as Jackson perfectly captures the exact thoughts that are going through my head. He then says to me, "You know, there were so many of Carl's balls last night that hit the back of the baseline that I could have easily hooked him a few times and he wouldn't have known . . . but yeah you know that little conscience gets at you if you know it was in . . . at least for me." I just smile, thinking

about how nice it was to play Jackson the day before because we mutually respected each other's calls and there was a spirit of fairness and good sportsmanship that permeated the match.

The wild card tournaments and qualies are definitely the worst in terms of cheating and bad line calls because players are calling their own lines, whereas for main draw matches there are chair umpires on each court. David, who often plays in the qualies for singles but in the main draw for doubles, shared the following insight with me, "Really, the qualies of Futures are the toughest place to be by far! It's really doggy dog out there." As I have travelled to multiple Futures events to compete in the qualies, I'm disappointed to see that the default for many players seems to be to call the ball out if it is anywhere on or close to the line. I have found that the clay court surface makes the problem even worse because guys point to a mark to justify their calls, but after the courts have been played on for over a set, it becomes very difficult to tell which mark is always the correct mark. Even when playing practice sets with Carl, my practice partner, he will search for a mark for a few seconds and then decide if it is definitely out or not. For me, if it is not clear right away which mark the ball has left, then I don't feel right searching for it and then calling it out, yet I see this happening time and time again.

Implicit in Jackson's remarks about the "little conscience" that plays a role in the way he calls lines is the fact that he does not feel comfortable cheating; however, I see so many of the other players who are calling lines incorrectly, and I feel myself resenting it more and more as I spend more time watching and playing matches. I am increasingly feeling that there is the attitude that "everyone is doing it, so I have to do it, too." DeSensi and Rosenberg (2010) have argued that one reason why there are increasing breaches in ethical behavior in sport, cheating being among these, is that in sport "another rationalization strategy is to claim 'everyone else is

doing it' or 'no one will get hurt,' and this grants one's judgment or action a modicum of legitimacy" (p. 14). In tennis, "when cheaters cheat, they choose to call balls out that are so close to the line that they can get away with it" (Claussen, 2009, p. 39), which makes it very hard to do anything about.

There is so little that separates so many of these players, and a few key points and crucial calls are often the difference in these close matches, especially in the later rounds when everyone is playing well and is at a very high level. In their article on norm-breaking behaviors among junior tennis players, Hanegby and Tenenbaum (2001) found that "norm-breaking behaviours are more likely to be committed in situations in which the two players are similar in skill-level. Each of them expects to win and therefore vulnerability to norm-breaking behavior increases when expectations are not met" (p. 133). Hanegby and Tenenbaum indicate that such norm-breaking behaviors include "inflicting physical or verbal acts upon another person, the self, or property without intending to harm . . . behaviors such as affronts with the referee or spectators, mistreatment of property, insulting umpires, and self-directed behaviors" (p. 118). Although cheating would go beyond norm-breaking behavior in that it is intended to do harm, it would seem logical that if norm-breaking behaviors are most prevalent during the third and decisive set of a match, as Hanegby and Tenenbaum (2001) found among junior tennis players (p. 132), and that norm-breaking behaviors are most common in matches involving players who are close to the same level, then cheating and more aggressive breaches of tennis etiquette and ethics would also increase as matches get closer and players are of similar ability.

The two guys playing on the court next to Jackson and me are in a very close match that goes to a decisive third set, and they appear to be very close in age, ability, and style. Although

we have not watched the entire match, we notice the same player who made the out call on the serve continues to call every ball close to the lines out, with his opponent becoming increasingly frustrated and angry. After watching for a few more minutes, as well as enjoying a break from the intensity of the Florida sun, Jackson and I go back out on the practice court and play points. If anything, we are generous with our calls, giving each other the benefit of the doubt. This might not be helping us win matches, but we finish our practice knowing that we have pushed each other hard, yet having maintained a mutual respect for each other and for the rules of the game. Practicing with Jackson is such a refreshing change from Carl, where I find it very hard to enjoy the practice, as even practice sets become confrontational with every close call being contested, questioned, and debated.

As Jackson and I continue our discussion on the problem of cheating in tennis, I think back to a Futures event in Plantation, Florida, January 2011, before I had begun my official field research but that I had documented in my reflexive journal. This was a match in which I had been accused of being a cheater. I was playing a guy from Argentina, and we were locked in a very close first set with the game score tied at 4-4. My opponent hit a ball that I saw landing just behind the baseline, and I called it out. It was very close to the line, but I saw it clearly behind the baseline and called it out. My opponent questioned my call and complained for a few seconds, yet I stayed firm with my call and we continued playing. Although my opponent moved on from this point, his mother would not let the call go. She was sitting behind the court on the side that I was serving on, and before I went to serve every point, she would yell out "cheater, cheater." Each time she did this, my blood would boil a little more as it continued game after game. Each time I would serve on the side of the court where she was sitting, she would say, just

loud enough for me to hear, “You’re such a cheater, you’re such a cheater.” I let it completely rattle me and lost the first set and then the match. Only when her son was comfortably ahead in the second set did she stop labeling me a cheater every time that I was close enough to her so that I could hear her, but nobody else could. Having the parent of my opponent heckle me throughout the match was a new level of gamesmanship that I hadn’t faced before, and it left a bitter taste in my mouth.

As a Ph.D. student who has been studying sport psychology for a number of years, I found it difficult to ignore the constant heckling and just focus on the match. Renowned tennis coach Nick Bollettieri (2008) recommends that when facing cheaters or adverse conditions, “no matter how intense and unpleasant the sting of a cheater is, you must stay focused on what truly matters—mastering your game and using the match to improve your skills” (p. 47). The Futures Tour provided me with many opportunities for real-life application of the mental skills that I have learned about and try help others with. I have become a better SPC as a result of my time playing Futures as I can empathize and understand what athletes are going through and have firsthand experience of the difficulty of focusing on a match and ignoring a distraction.

As Jackson and I walk off the practice court, I say to him, “Is it any wonder why so many of these guys cheat? While I was watching your match yesterday against Carl, I couldn’t help but overhear the father of one player, who had just lost a close match, yelling at his son about what a horrible player he is, that he has no heart, and that he was way too generous with line calls. Each time that the player tried to defend himself, his father would yell at him more and tell him that if he didn’t toughen up and get some balls, he would never make it in this sport. I stopped listening to the exchange after that but felt sorry for the poor kid (who looked to be an

older junior or young college age player) not only having to deal with a tough loss but also the wrath of his father. I wonder what his mind set will be going on the court next time and what he will be thinking when the ball hits anywhere close to the line, and what his father will say to him if he doesn't call the ball out.

The player that I witnessed enduring the ten-minute verbal assault from his father must feel pressure as he will surely have to weigh the consequences of dealing with future berating from his father or possibly cheating his way to victory to avoid having to endure that type of verbal assault. Casper (2006), in his study on cheating in junior tennis, found that the top reason his participants thought that cheating was so prevalent in junior tennis is due to parental pressure (p. 30). After interviewing ranked junior tennis players, Casper concluded the following:

It is hard to blame a junior player who is placed under extreme social pressure to win.

They would much rather deal with the negative consequences and maybe even the guilt of cheating or committing a "code" violation rather than negotiate through the negative consequences of losing a match based on social consequences such as parental and coach pressure (p. 32).

Perhaps the player being berated by his father needs financial support from his father, as parental support is typical for players competing on the Futures Tour. Social support, including parental support, often makes it possible for players to compete on the tour, yet it can also lead to their decision to drop out of tennis.

While the research shows that social support is essential for most athletes to achieve a high level of performance, it can also negatively affect them (Coakley, 2009). The tennis documentary *The Journeyman* (Grant & Keil, 2004) followed the careers of two tennis players,

Geoff Grant and Mark Keil, as they struggled to compete on the main ATP tour during the late 1990's. Within the documentary, Grant discussed the pressures that he felt from his father, who supported his tennis career but also put enormous pressure on him to win. Grant described the effect of such pressure on the entire household: "The mood of the house was dictated by my wins and losses." During an important match that Grant played at the US Open in 1998, all that he could focus on was the negative facial expressions and body language that his father would make each time that he missed a big shot on an important point. Similarly, Puente-Diaz and Anshel (2005) found that the one of the top two stressors for U.S. junior players was "receiving negative comments and body language from others (i.e., coaches, relatives)" (p. 436).

In their case study of three tennis players who had been very promising junior tennis players in France but had failed to reach the elite level that their early success would have predicted, Delforge and Le Scanff (2006) found that all three players had experienced enormous pressure from at least one of their parents, and in these cases it was the father who provided the most pressure on their child. Delforge and Le Scanff stated that this parental pressure "may have had an impact on the athletes' progress only, but it may also sometimes have altered their psychological development. Such was the case when parents went over the limit (verbal violence, depreciation, strictness, oversized ambition)" (p. 244). Even on the Futures Tour, where the majority of former collegiate players are legally adults, I saw many instances where social support turned more into social pressure and negatively affected players' level of success and ultimately their decisions about continuing to play on the tour.

As I am watching Carl play his quarterfinal match in the Innisbrook Wild Card tournament against a French-speaking player, I am amazed and amused about the terrible

language that his opponent is directing at himself, at Carl, and at the couple of the guys who are watching him play. There is a group of French-speaking players who are traveling and training together, and they converse back and forth with each other in French, even when one of them is playing—which is not allowed according to ITF rules as it could be considered to be coaching (ITF, 2011c). “Merde, je joue comme un cochon, bâtard” and the list of insults and French slang continue. I am the only other person watching, and they have no idea that I speak French fluently after having lived in France and Switzerland for two years. I understand these words because I understand players using language that the U.S. umpires don’t understand, and in college where many of us spoke foreign languages, we would often curse in our foreign language of choice. Our practices and matches in college were tennis’s version of the Tower of Babel with choice words being uttered in French, Spanish, Albanian, Korean, and Portuguese.

However, what is really bothering me watching Carl’s match is the obvious coaching that is taking place between Carl’s opponent and one of his traveling mates. I debate in my head what to do. *Should I say something? Should I go and get the umpire to intervene? What is the ethical thing for me to do? I don’t want to make enemies out here on the tour, yet something needs to be done.* I am about to open my mouth and practice my somewhat rusty French skills when finally the umpire comes over and tells the French players who are watching to be sure to keep everything that they say in English. After that they slink away and there is no more problem. Carl’s opponent continues to mutter to himself in French, yet without the audience of his buddies to feed on, he tones it way down.

Carl loses a close first set and then retires early in the second set of his match with a leg injury. I figure it is probably some lingering effects of his cramping from the night before. We

head down to Fort Myers for a few days before the qualifying tournament starts because we can stay at my parents' condo and can save a few nights of expenses for lodging. Carl and I have a huge argument during the two-hour drive to Fort Myers. This is the first time that I have ever really traveled with someone since college, and I have never traveled with only one person before. Carl is under 25 so it would have cost an extra \$25 a day in order to have him as a driver on the rental car, so I act as chauffeur for the entire trip.

Down time between tournaments: Ft. Myers, Florida, Summer 2011. Since Carl has never been to Florida before, he wants to spend some of our time between the wild card tournament and the qualies at the beach. I just want to train, relax a little bit, and work on my comps, yet I also feel an obligation to Carl as I agreed to travel with him. We spend an entire day at the beach; I get terribly sunburned, and don't feel well for the next couple of days. I drive Carl to the beach the next day, but I make him stay there by himself. By the time I pick him up in the afternoon, it is raining and we don't even get to practice and get a hit in.

I get increasingly frustrated about the lack of training that I am getting because one of the things that I had been most excited about when I agreed to travel with Carl was having a practice partner. It is not always easy for me to find consistently good hitting partners, especially since college, so I had been excited to have someone good to hit with. However, as Carl never practices over an hour and never practices twice in a day, I don't feel like I am getting as much training as I want or need. The time at my parents' condo is difficult, and things are tense between us, especially since our argument in the car on the way down. I realize more and more the complexity of doing an experiential sport ethnography, where I am doing much more than

just interviewing my participants, but also traveling with, competing against, and practicing with them. I am learning with Carl that it is not always easy to balance all of these roles.

When we finally do get on the court to practice, I don't feel particularly confident. "Why can't you move better on this stuff," Carl asks me incredulously after finishing our practice on the clay courts at my parents' condo complex. "Well I didn't grow up on this stuff so it isn't exactly second nature to me," I respond. I didn't even step on a clay court until age 16, and Carl grew up on red clay before moving to the U.S. as a young teen. Clay is a surface that dries out easily and is only feasible in a humid climate (Collins, 1994), so there are few clay courts in the Western United States. Carl seems so comfortable moving on the surface, and I just feel awkward. The surface is slippery, unpredictable, and at times can be frustrating. This experience makes me realize how even court surface and the changing environments from one tournament to the next can be very difficult for a player to handle. Participant Troy also spoke of the importance of finding surfaces that you play well on:

I basically learned my lesson that I've got to maximize the surfaces that I play best on . . . clay court not so much because I'm Australian and we don't really have clay courts in Australia so I avoid them these days . . . in terms of winning it kind of helps my chances. I don't really have a choice as I have to play Futures where I can afford to drive, and the majority of Futures tournaments in the Southeastern U.S. are on clay.

Carl grew up on clay in his native country, and then as a 19-year-old spent another six months training at one of the top tennis academies in his home country. While I might be moving like a fish out of water on the grainy green surface, Carl is effortlessly sliding into his

shots and seems right at home. Sam, another participant, shared with me the difficulty of playing against those who have grown up planning tennis on clay:

I mean I don't particularly mind playing on clay, but it's tough when you play South American, Central American guys coming up. What do you want from the U.S. players, where even the majority of USTA high performance training facilities don't have clay courts, so you have to go somewhere else to train on clay, so yeah it's tough to play those guys who have been on it their whole lives and train on it all the time.

U.S. players have not had much success on clay at the French Open, the only major played on clay, in recent years, and most U.S. players have an inferiority complex when it comes to playing on the surface (Agassi, 2009).

One night in Florida we go to dinner with my mom who has flown in to watch me play. After dinner my mom pays for my dinner without either of us thinking anything about it. Although I am an adult male, my mom is more financially secure than I am, and she knows that I make almost nothing as a grad student and that I'm sacrificing a lot of money and resources to go out on the Futures Tour. I sincerely appreciate her paying for dinner, especially as I'm on the road paying for hotels, gas, and rental cars. "You can't let your mother pay for you," Carl says to me with a look of obvious disgust and forcefulness in his voice. I am completely taken back by his harsh and condescending tone. The force with which Carl barks at me puts me on the defensive. "It's an honor to pay for your mother and father for dinner—and when I go out with my parents, I pay for them." I explain to Carl that financially I am not in a great position and that it is going to be a struggle for me to get by for the next year as I am traveling and competing on the tour and working on my dissertation.

It seems to me that to Carl this does not matter, as I have potentially violated a cultural norm for him—that of a grown man letting his mother buy him dinner. Again understanding cultural differences helps me to perhaps better understand why Carl reacted in such a forceful manner to an obvious cultural norm of his that I had broken. Kontos (2009) stated that for most males coming from a Latino culture, “Machismo affects the expectation for behavior and pride among Latino males . . . and must be considered as an explanation for masculine behaviors such as aggression” (p. 109). In my many interactions with participants, I realize that most are receiving some form of tangible support (Rees, Ingledew, & Hardy, 1999) from parents or other sources, and those who do not have such support, like Dean, had to stop playing. Fisher, Roper, and Butryn (2009) indicated the importance of understanding athlete differences to realize that “an athlete is not just an athlete but a gendered, raced, classed, sexually-oriented, able-bodied human being” (p. 24).

As I have reflected back on my time traveling with Carl, I have gained increased awareness that cultural differences are not easy to always identify, and these identities and cultural practices are formed through a complex interplay of country of origin, regionalism, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic class, and other individual differences that we bring to each situation. I believe that I better understand myself and what assumptions and cultural norms I bring to each situation, as well as being more understanding of others.

Innisbrook Qualies: Summer 2011. After a few days in Fort Myers, we head back up to Innisbrook for the qualies. We have to sign in on Thursday afternoon and then start play on Friday. Although I have just finished warming up Carl for his match that is scheduled for 10:30 a.m., the tournament is already running behind schedule because many of the 9 a.m. matches are

still going on. Carl is waiting by the tournament desk for his match, and I am so happy to see David and have the opportunity to talk to someone else for a change.

Jacob: "Hey David, it's good to see you? When do you play?"

David: "Jake, what's up man? How's the travels going?"

Jacob: "Well, it's been a long couple of weeks to be honest. It's certainly been interesting, and I had no idea how long it could seem to travel with someone day after day."

David: "Yeah, tell me about it. I've been sleeping on box springs for the past week, so I'm definitely looking for something else. Jason and I picked up another player down in Indian Harbor so we've had three in a room and I got the roll away bed. Hoping it's better up here."

Jacob: "Are you staying in the tournament hotel?"

David: "Yeah, and to be honest I wish we weren't. When they posted the rate I had no idea that there would be these huge resort fees every day, it doesn't provide breakfast, and they don't even have wireless access in the rooms. It's close to the courts but that's about all it has going for it. Where are you staying?"

Jacob: "I actually got a place just about five minutes up road. It's half the price of the tournament hotel, it has breakfast, and it's not bad. Nothing fancy but it's close and fine for us."

David: "Yeah, maybe I'll have to look into switching depending on how long we are here this week."

Jacob: "What happened last week? I didn't see your name in the Doubles?"

David: "Yeah, we asked for a wild card and didn't get it. My partner doesn't have a ranking yet, and mine wasn't high enough to get both of us in so we needed that wild card—but they gave it to a couple of young Americans over my partner, who is of course not American."

Even though my partner made the semis of the singles last week so he'll have a ranking after this coming week and we'll have no problem after that—but his ranking won't be in the system yet so we'll need a wildcard this week as well."

Jacob: "That sucks. It's too bad because you guys would have had a decent shot at winning the tournament. Are you playing together for the rest of the summer or are you going to play some more with Sam?"

David: "Sam's decided to start law school in the fall so he isn't really going to be playing regularly. He wasn't really training that hard anyway and was just kind of doing it and seeing where it would go. We are just at different places in our careers and what we want to do with tennis.

Jacob: "That makes sense. I thought that Sam was maybe going to defer law school because you guys won a Futures and weren't doing too bad."

David: "Yeah, we played well together and he had some decent wins in singles—but even so he really wasn't putting the training and time into it to make it a full-time thing. He still might play a few but just sporadically."

Jacob: "Well, I guess I'll see you later this afternoon as we both are scheduled around three. Let me know if you want to try and hit a few before going out on the court"

David: "Ok. And we'll be sure and hit some when we get back home."

This is an insightful conversation that I have with David because I realize that as experienced as he is and as long as he has been playing on the tour, it is never easy and there are always arrangements to be worked out—traveling situations change, doubles partners split up, and circumstances don't always work out as planned. Marks (2006) wrote that "the easiest place to

stay is the recommended 'player hotel,' as the tournament director will have negotiated player discounts and transportation to and from the tournament site" (p. 169). Although this may be good general advice, after talking with David who is staying in the tournament hotel, I realize that I am paying half the price that he is, I am only five minutes away from the tournament, and my place comes with breakfast and free wireless which his does not. Even experienced players need to be constantly trying to find ways to save money and find the best deals possible. I understand the USTA wanting to give two U.S. players a chance in the doubles, yet for somebody like David who is having the majority of his success in doubles, it would have been a real blow to not get into the doubles of the previous week's tournament. Interestingly, David and his partner are awarded a wild card into the doubles at Innisbrook and go on to win the tournament.

Carl wins his match in three sets, is exhausted, and agrees to take the car back to the hotel by himself. It is an easy five-minute drive, and I just hope that he doesn't have an accident in such a short distance, as he is not insured on the car. My mom drives up from Fort Myers, and it is nice to see a different face and to have her support (Côté, 1999). Even though the tournament is running way behind, I stick around the tournament site because I have to be there when they call my name. My mom runs and gets me a sandwich. This particular tournament has not provided players with any type of official players' lounge, so I lie down in the hall and take a nap with my tennis bag acting as pillow. My mom brings back a sandwich, I eat it, and think that there is still a lot of time before my match. Suddenly, I hear my name being called and told that I have to get out to court 7 because my opponent is out there waiting. I usually do a great job of being prepared, but there must have been a bunch of courts that finished at the same time

because I had checked thirty minutes earlier and there were still six matches to go on before mine. I go out on to the court without my ankle brace on and still feeling full from my sandwich. I quickly put my brace on, grab a racket, and start warming up.

I had felt fine in my match in the wild card earlier in the week, but during this match, I immediately sense that again my body is overheating and that my core temperature is elevated. *The day at the beach and the sunburn certainly helped me prepare for the match, not to mention the practice sessions.* After the warm-up, I have already soaked through a shirt, and I feel sluggish and tired. I really feel like this is an opponent that I can beat and I have lots of chances. However, I continue to fight my body throughout the match. I walk to my towel between points, having to dry off after every rally and hang my body because I don't have the energy to keep it up. *What's wrong with my body? I just need to get that cold towel back around my neck. I am drenched and wonder if I will go through every dry shirt in my bag. Gosh my legs feel heavy. Why can't I just put more pressure on my opponent on the big points? There goes another game that I should have won and let slip away.* I'm fighting two battles out there, one against my opponent, and one against myself. I had felt so much more ready going into this match, but my body is letting me down, and it is taking so much energy just to be out there that I can't seem to put the necessary energy into the tennis itself. I'm frustrated because I know that I work out hard and that I am in good shape, yet for some reason my body chemistry is way off and I lose the match

I can't figure out why I am having such a hard time adjusting to the hot, muggy, and humid conditions. I usually handle the heat and humidity really well so it has been really frustrating over the course of the previous few weeks to feel like I am unable to cool down and

adjust to the conditions like I am accustomed to. I need to be focusing on each point of the match, yet all I can think about are different ways to cool down as I am drowning in sweat and feel like my body is zapped of energy. I try to drink more on changeovers between games, yet that leaves me feeling bloated and sluggish, and I can't seem to find a happy medium. I lose the first set, but I start the second set by getting up a couple of games and finally playing a little bit better tennis. I have a chance to go up a break in the second set, yet I squander four break points and then lose a 40-love lead in my next service game to go down 2-3, where I feel like I could easily be up 4-1 and in a good position to win the set.

Then I begin to snap. Whether it's loss of patience, loss of energy, or a combination of factors, I not only struggle physically but mentally as well. Hanegby and Tenenbaum (2001) found that in junior tennis players, "the most common (37%) norm-breaking behaviors that were observed were behaviors directed towards property, mainly throwing the racket towards various objects in the immediate vicinity (i.e. court, chairs, net, and fences)" (p. 123). I hate becoming part of this statistic, yet even though I have an advanced degree in sport psychology and feel a certain responsibility to act a certain way on the court, I throw my racket hard against the dusty clay court surface. Within seconds, I hear a shrill voice calling out, "Warning Court 6 Racket Abuse." Earlier in the day it took the umpire thirty minutes to even notice the tirade taking place on Carl's court, and here I am throwing my racket and the umpire immediately jumps all over me. I deserve a racket abuse warning, yet it doesn't help me to play better and it doesn't make me feel better about myself. I only throw my racket, something I have only done one other time in my career, because I am so frustrated with my lost opportunity and my body that is letting me down. Fortunately, because I've thrown my racket on clay, which is a softer and more forgiving

surface than a hard court, my racket doesn't break. I'm relieved about that because I don't have a lot of extra money to go buy a new racket, and the endorsement contracts are not exactly rolling in.

This reminds me of Jackson's comments that "a good junior player, a good college player gets free clothes, free rackets . . . and when you turn pro, you can be very good and much better than before and you don't get any of that on tour." This is why I'm happy my loss of control doesn't also result in a loss of a racket. I lose the match and sit for 15 minutes in my chair, depleted, exhausted, frustrated, and ready to get away from the tournament. David is playing a South American player on the court next to me. They have some argument about a line call, and David's opponent refuses to continue playing until an umpire comes over to check the mark. No umpire can be found, and play is halted for the entire fifteen minutes that I sit in my chair trying to find the energy to get up and walk off the court. Again I laugh, thinking about how quickly the umpire jumped on me and gave me a racket abuse warning, while David and his opponent have a disagreement and no umpire can be found. This experience shows me that although I have a lot of experience with sport psychology and mental training, when put in a pressure situation, fighting against an opponent and myself, I am not immune to the same challenges, outbursts, and behavior of my peers. However, from that match on, I try not lose my cool on the court as I do feel a responsibility to conduct myself in a certain way.

This experience also gives me more empathy for players on the tour and the pressures that they must feel as they are trying to make it on the tour. I felt the competitive pressure because I wanted to do well, I wanted to win, and I wanted to have a good showing. However, I also know that professional tennis is not going to be my career and that I am not really concerned

with where my ranking would end up at the end of this process. Although the experience has been challenging, I feel that the fact that I was competing and putting myself out there makes me a more empathetic researcher, SPC, and human being.

Up until my loss and racket abuse warning, I have done everything that I could to accommodate Carl and make his first experience of competing and traveling on the tour a positive one. I feel a responsibility to him and I want to help make his first experiences on the tour a success. After this loss, I have to do something for myself and that means getting away from tennis for a few days. I recognize some of warning signs of burnout (Goodger, Lavallee, Gorely, & Harwood, 2010) and that I need to get away from the grind of the tour for a few days. Participant Troy shared with me that he cannot be on the road for more than three weeks at a time without losing motivation, and this is about the amount of time that I have been traveling with Carl and I need a break. Instead of going back to the hotel with Carl, I drive back down to my parents' condo a few hours away where I get away from the tournament and the environment of the tour for a little while. Although Carl is not technically supposed to drive the rental car, the hotel where we have been staying is only five minutes from the tennis club and there are many restaurants close by. Fortunately, he has no problem, and I rejoin him a few days later before we drive back up to the Orlando airport and conclude our trip.

The whole summer circuit of Futures was a good reminder to me of the difficulty of balancing the many roles that I was faced with, including those of player, researcher, Ph.D. student, informal, if not formal, mentor/sport psych consultant, traveling/practice partner, and others that arose. As I moved in to the fall and winter Futures tournaments, I made the choice to travel and stay by myself. Although I took a hit financially, I decided that it was the best way to

move forward and avoid potential complications. I still had to find players to practice with, as well as players that would be willing to be interviewed as participants for the study, so I had no shortage of interaction with Futures players. Fortunately, I was able to continue practicing with David on a regular basis, Jackson and I became friends, and I gained further insights by meeting many other players out there on tour.

Pensacola, Florida: Fall 2011. As the dusty streets of Pensacola welcome me, I realize that this isn't the same Florida that I had traveled to during the summer. There are no white picket fences and colonial style club houses here. This tournament was being held at a public park and the clay courts are being used by a USTA league, so I go out onto the cracked hard courts to practice my serve. On the last court, I see another player practicing his serve with an older man that I assume to be his father. The younger player looks like a very good player, but even good players usually don't travel with a coach, so I assume it is his father. After finishing my basket of serves, I walk down to end courts and introduce myself. "Hi, I'm Jacob," "Hey man, what's up—I'm Victor and this is my father Luis." "I just saw you down here and wondered if you'd like to get a hit in later today on the clay," I respond. "Yeah, sure that'd be great, should we say around 4 p.m. or so." "Sure that's great. Where you coming from?" "Yeah, I live in San Antonio and my Dad lives in Houston, and we just drove up together for these couple of tournaments. I just took a job as a college coach, but we're not in season now so I'm just trying to get some tournament in, see how I do, and then evaluate how much more I want to play, maybe head back out on tour next summer. How about you?" "Yeah, I'm actually in grad school and just play in Futures events when I can. I'm actually studying sport psychology and doing a research study on some of the psychological challenges and aspects of

players' experiences out here on tour, so I try to get to as many as I can, meet guys like yourself, and also enjoy playing." "Now, why couldn't my son do something like that," Luis chimes in. "Victor is so smart, got all A's in college, and now he wants to be a coach for a living and play some tennis. What did I do wrong? I mean he's so good at math and science; I mean he could be a doctor or whatever." "Let's go Dad," as I see the obvious annoyance in Victor's eyes as if they've been over this same topic a thousand times. "Okay, see you at 4." "Yeah see you at 4," I respond, happy to have someone to hit with and someone whom I can potentially interview as a participant.

I head back to the tennis courts around 3:45 and run into Jackson. "Hey man how's it going, do you want to hit?" "I'm actually already hitting with another guy, but if you can't find someone else, let me know." "No problem . . . There's actually a player that I've been training with in Atlanta that's moving up your way pretty soon, so I'll give him your number to train, is that cool?" "Sure that's great," I respond as I love how the networking starts naturally happening more and more. Even though I am now traveling to the tournaments alone, I don't feel like I'm alone as I run into participants that I know, and I meet new players like Victor.

I have a great practice session with Victor, who had also been a good college player, and still loves the game, and is really enjoying coaching. His father, Luis, although extremely friendly, is not too happy with his son's career choice. Victor tells me that he ultimately had to decide what was best for his him and that staying involved in tennis was what he wanted to do. I am hoping to get an interview with him, but the next day I lost to an up and coming player from Japan, who is now on Japan's Davis cup team and playing mainly in Challengers and smaller ATP tournaments, and Victor loses to a seeded player in three tough sets. We both want to get

out of Pensacola and I never get to interview him as participant although I learn a lot from him by practicing and talking together in preparation for the tournament. Victor is typical of many players with whom I got to practice, interact, learn about, and record field notes on, but whom I never formally interviewed as a participant.

Plantation, Florida: January 2012. This is the tournament where the mother of my opponent had called me a cheater the year before, so I head into this tournament with mixed memories and emotions. I'm happy to be back in the warmth of Florida; I have been training very hard over the break without the interruption of classes or as many responsibilities as I typically have. I have been able to put in 3-4 hours of good training a day as encouraged by Ericsson (2003), as the number of hours of deliberate practice necessary each day to reach expert levels in sport. I don't expect a few weeks of intense training to suddenly launch me to the tournament title; however, I do feel confident in my game and ready to play. The only problem is that I had missed the IPIN online registration, and my only hope of getting in to the tournament is to show up on Thursday, sign in, and hope that there are enough players or alternates who have decided to not show up or sign in. When I get to the tournament desk, I'm not encouraged to see a line running out the building, and as I'm waiting in line, I realize that all the college coaches have told their players to get some match practice in before the season starts, so in addition to the regular players that I see, there are many college players who don't play the Futures on a regular basis trying to get in. I'm the 143rd guy to sign in and my chances don't look good.

I check the draw on Thursday evening, and I don't get in. Annoyed that I hadn't registered online, which it turns out would have gotten me directly in based off of my top 500

U.S. national ranking, my mom has flown in with me, and overall I feel discouraged. I am as fit as I have been in months, I'm eager to play, and I don't get in. I still have a chance to show up the next morning as an alternate, and if someone doesn't show up for a match, there is still a chance I could get to play. It had happened once before in my first Futures in Sacramento in 2008, when I had gotten in as an alternate, so there is still hope. I check online and see that the alternate sign-in is at 8:30 a.m. on Friday morning.

Qualies Plantation, Florida, January 2012. 8:03 a.m.: "Yes I'm here to sign in as an alternate," I say to the tournament referee. "Sorry, alternate sign-in closed three minutes ago," he responds. "But the online official form said that alternate sign in closes at 8:30 so I'm here in plenty of time," I plead. "No, alternate sign-in closes a half an hour before the first matches start, and the first matches are scheduled for 8:30." "Yes, but the schedule online clearly said 8:30 is the alternate sign-in" I argue, not wanting my last chance at playing to slip away. "Protocol is protocol and we can't make exceptions," the tournament referee responds gruffly. I have flown thousands of miles, missed the original entry, and now my only chance at getting in is taken away. I am there by 8:03, three minutes after the alternate sign in closes, and it's not even the time that the USTA has posted on the official sheet. I am furious, but feel that there is nothing that I can do, and so I head over to the site of the next wildcard tournament in Weston to get some more training in. I am reminded of Jackson's words as he had told me in our interview his impressions of how players in the qualies are often treated:

Some things that trouble me about the tour is the compassion that the tour officials show the qualifying players. I've won a wildcard event and played the main draw and seen the treatment you get in a main draw compared to the treatment in the qualies when you

know they are all the same or similar players; it's a little weird to me that they get treated so differently.

Other participants like David and Jim also indicated how much better main draw players get treated than those in the qualies, which is interesting considering that when Jim finally broke through and won a Futures tournament, he started in the qualies, so the difference between the players is often very slight.

I try not to dwell on my frustration at the officials and the way that I have been treated. I go back to the hotel, check the USTA pro-circuit website, and confirm that the official alternate sign-in on the official schedule of play is 8:30. I contemplate printing it off and taking it over to the officials and decide instead to go and practice. I still have a wild card tournament coming up before the Weston, Florida, Futures and I put my energy into being ready for that. The day of my first match, I wake up with a terrible stomach ache, throw up all day, and have to pull out of the tournament. Two tournaments in Florida, one I don't get into, and the other one I pull out of with the flu. This is just another chapter in the saga of life on the road as a Futures player.

Palm Coast, Florida: January 2012. This time I drive to the tournament, optimistic that I will for sure get in and ready to actually play a match, unlike the previous debacle. This is also the final tournament that I will be playing in, as I have my last interview, and will also be practicing with David and Jackson. I arrive in Palm Coast, drive for miles and see nothing but trees and cow pastures. Then in the middle of a field, I see sixteen beautiful well-kept clay courts. It's always interesting to see where tennis courts get built, and although they're seemingly in the middle of nowhere, it looks like a nice facility to play at.

I walk onto the practice court with Jackson, already exhausted from the intense two-hour practice I had with David. I am not concerned with overdoing it before my match the next day, because I feel my priority has shifted to helping participants like David and Jackson be ready for their matches. “Hey how ya doing Jacob—thanks so much for coming out here.” “I’m pretty tired after hitting with David, but I’m happy to give it my best,” I respond. “No, I really appreciate it man, I really do.” When I had last spoken with Jackson, he had revealed to me some of his frustrations over trying to get guys to train and practice with on the tour, and I know that he genuinely appreciates that I’ll hit with him despite having already spent hours on the court.

When Jackson first started playing again on the Futures Tour at the beginning of 2011, he had hoped to find some support among fellow African-American players, but has been finding that many of the young African-American players are more interested in themselves than in making connections to other African-American tennis players:

I kind of just thought that maybe I could kind of relate with a couple of Black players on tour, or at least thought that I would have a little bit of support system there, but that’s not the case at all. Everyone is all in their own world. I think the William’s [Venus and Serena Williams] had a lot to do with that because they were so isolated and all the Black players out there now are coming out isolated and looking to be on their own to make it which is unfortunate . . . like with you if I need a hit no problem let’s figure it out, so I kind of thought that I would have a little bit of support system there, but that’s not the case at all.

Jackson has found it very difficult to find any base of support, regardless of race, and that is one reason he appreciates having someone like me who is not only willing but happy to hit with him.

After another couple of hours on court, I am running on fumes and am relieved to see a group of guys headed towards our court. They are all young, and I recognize them as some of the top juniors and members of the junior U.S. Davis Cup team. One of the USTA coaches asks if we're done because they would really like to have the court. I'm actually relieved that they want the court as I need a break and some food. These are the young junior players that the USTA is throwing thousands of dollars into for their training, providing them housing, top level coaching, and everything necessary for them young players to develop as players at the USTA National Training center in Boca Raton, Florida (Russell, 2010). I can't help but compare these guys all decked out in their free clothing and huge tennis bags, traveling with a coach who arranges things for them, to Jackson and me who are out there at 30 and 31 years of age, trying to help each other with our games and make a go of it.

This experience also reminds me of Jackson's frustration at the USTA who has provided him with little help despite being one of the top U.S. players in his region of the country. Although he certainly faced racial prejudice and discrimination when he was younger, he identifies economic issues as often creating problems today. Jackson has lived in a city near a USTA training facility that is housed at a private tennis club. Although Jackson spoke with one of the coaches about playing there, his calls are never returned and he is basically ignored—not because he is African American, but he believes it is because he is not a member of an exclusive and very expensive private club: "I think the problem with tennis and the USTA it's more an economic problem, and it kind of encompasses all races." Jackson also wonders why the USTA

has a training facility at such a location and indicates that the USTA could do a much better job of facilitating players' ability to connect with players from other locations and find hitting opportunities and partners wherever they may travel. These statements are consistent with sport sociologist Coakley's (2009) point that "clubs are sites for establishing relationships that are used to perpetuate status" (p. 319). Jackson confirms this point as he further stated, "If you're not in the right scene, if you're not at the right club, you are kind of frowned upon." Although the USTA has worked to break down some of these barriers, changes still need to be made.

Match Day, Palm Coast: January 2012. Although my match doesn't go as I would like it to have, I am happy to watch David win his match and watch Jackson play, although he loses a tough four-hour marathon to a seeded player. I decide to stay at the tournament, continue watching David, and talk to as many Futures players as I can. The next morning, as I am watching David beat a promising young U.S. player, I get a text from Jackson who is supposed to be on his way back home, "Hey, Jacob, my car just got towed, can you come get me." I hop in my car and go and pick up Jackson who laments that the last thing he needs is an expensive repair for his car. I drive him back to his hotel, where he had already checked out and now has to pay for another night. As we are driving, he says to me, "After you left yesterday, I saw some of the tournament people putting bins of ice and bottled water on all of the courts for the players, but a USTA official called and said, 'You can't do this; take all the bins off the court; that's just for main draw players.' Yeah, I just wanted some water, but I guess qualifiers don't deserve water; and then the official said, 'Yeah, the qualifiers can just drink out of the water fountain instead of bottled water.' " Jackson then said to me, "Yeah, you get the feeling at sign-in that sometimes you are bothering them by showing up or something you know; they don't treat you

well.” I then share with him my experience from Plantation, and we both laugh thinking about what a crazy existence this life on the Futures Tour can be.

Palm Coast, Florida: Final Futures tournament. I spend the day with Jackson until his car is finally ready to be picked up at the shop, and fortunately it only costs him a couple of hundreds of dollars and not a couple of thousand as he had feared. I spend another day at the tournament, see David win another match, and then head back on the road, anticipating the 10-hour drive ahead of me. As I drive away from the tournament, I realize what participants like David, Jackson, and others have come to mean to me. I originally felt like they were doing me a huge favor in letting me practice with them, warm them up for matches, and become part of their world. As I leave Palm Coast, I realize that I have become an important part of their network of social support, and although I won’t be going on Tour again, I know that we will remain lifelong friends. I am reminded of Sands’ words in describing experiential ethnography and the ethnographer’s relationship to participants:

Ethnography is not only an academic and professional endeavor but also a personal revelation of others and the fieldworker . . . many cultural members become lifelong friends, some become lifelong enemies, but that is life. Ethnography is not for everybody, nor should it be. It involves a blend of patience, understanding, and trust—qualities that supposedly make good humans. (Sands, 2002, p. 118)

This ethnography has given me opportunities to learn patience and trust as I have gained a better understanding of the life of those competing on the Futures Tour.

The time spent in the field doing an experiential sport ethnography provided me with a rich data set. The intent of this autoethnography was to convey the complexity of my experience

as participant researcher and to allow readers to better understand what it is like to travel and compete on the tour. The data from the 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews that I conducted with participants added to my understanding of what players experienced and provided further insight into the life of Futures Tour players. I came more and more to realize the complexity of their experiences and recognize that many participants had experienced more than just the initial transition from college to professional tennis as they had been and were in different transitional periods.

Chapter III

Results and Discussion

Although all participants had been former college tennis players who had transitioned to professional tennis and had competed on the Futures Tour, they had different experiences and were in different transitional periods. As I transcribed and read the transcripts of the interviews with the 10 participants, and as I met with my dissertation advisor, it became increasingly clear that themes I produced from the data were experienced uniquely depending upon the different transitional periods the players were in or had been in; there was no simple linear progression through the transitional periods. I identified three transitional periods that participants had experienced or were experiencing and recognized that several had even transitioned from one period to another during the course of this study. Although themes emerged from the data, those themes looked somewhat different from one period to another, with the sub-themes varying according to the transitional period.

I identified three transitional periods associated with participants' experience. The first transitional period involved the transition from college to professional tennis; during this time, players could transition back and forth between these two, especially for those college players who competed in Futures tournaments during their college years and for those players who left college to participate on the Tour and then go back to complete their degrees. The second transitional period represented a more subtle transition of settling into the life of competing full-time on the Tour; this is a stage that some participants and many former college tennis players never reached because it requires substantial resources and commitment. The third transitional period represented a transitional time of moving on or moving out, when players either moved up

to the next level of professional tennis or they transitioned off the Tour and made other career and life choices.

Common themes emerged across these transitional periods, but the sub-themes varied from one period to another. The themes and sub-themes looked different depending on what transitional period a player was either in or had transitioned out of. Even though not all participants had experienced all three transitional periods, there were enough responses and data to see which sub-themes were most prevalent in each of the periods. In the following chapter, I introduce and describe both the transitional periods and the themes and overall sub-themes associated with each period. Instead of following a traditional thematic structure with a presentation of themes and sub-themes, I present the themes within the three transitional periods described above, with the most prevalent and salient sub-theme presented within each transitional period. Such an approach is consistent with Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, and Côté's (2009) call for more research on "studying a range of transitions within an athletic career—the so called 'a whole career approach'" (p. 396) in order to better understand athletes' experiences. The themes are presented in this way in order to more effectively capture the complexity and ever-changing nature of participants' experiences on the Futures Tour.

The themes and sub-themes, as well as how they are represented within these different transitional periods, emerged from my data analysis of the interview transcripts of the 10 participants as well as from field notes and reflexive journal entries from my time spent in the research field. I use the words of the participants themselves to present these themes, and I also connect these themes to the research literature. Although all participants had unique backgrounds and individual experiences competing on tour, there are patterns of experiences and

beliefs that emerged from participant responses. These themes and sub-themes highlight important aspects of participants' experiences at each transitional period of their careers.

Overview of Themes

Five overall themes emerged from the data: the impact of the experience on the players' lives, the uncertainty that they experienced while competing on the tour, the mental discipline required to succeed on the tour, the support players needed to continue on the tour, and the urgency that they continually felt. These themes looked different, however, according to the transitional period players experienced (see Table 1).

Impact on Life. Leaving college tennis and venturing into the world of professional tennis at the Futures level impacts all aspects of players' lives. When putting words to their experience of pursuing tennis on a professional tour with very little monetary or other rewards, participants often realized, almost for the first time, what a unique situation they were in and how much pursuing professional tennis has impacted their lives. Trent's comments provide an example of such a realization:

There's a lot of different aspects to being a pro tennis player and it's pretty crazy. It sounds pretty crazy when you actually talk about it and put into words what I'm really trying to do. Wow it's pretty crazy isn't it?

All participants had chosen to pursue professional tennis, and tennis has affected their lives in profound ways. Some participants such as Rick, Kurt, and Dean chose to leave such craziness behind for a more predictable and financially secure career and lifestyle. Others, like David, have chosen to embrace the challenge, develop the mental discipline, and seek out the necessary support to continue his journey on tour. Regardless of the choices they make, competing on the

Table 1. Themes and Sub-Themes within Transitional Periods

Themes					
	<i>Impact on Life</i>	<i>Uncertainty</i>	<i>Mental Discipline</i>	<i>Support</i>	<i>Urgency</i>
Transitional Period	Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes	Sub-Themes
Transitional Period I: Going from College to Pro Tennis	<i>Life-Defining</i>	<i>Uncertainty of Success</i>	<i>Self-Reliance</i>	<i>Emotional Support</i>	<i>Urgency to Play</i>
Transitional Period II: Competing on Tour Full-time	<i>Life- Consuming</i>	<i>Uncertainty of Arrangements</i>	<i>Consistency of Performance</i>	<i>Structural Support</i>	<i>Urgency to Stay on Tour</i>
Transitional Period III: Moving Up or Moving Out	<i>Life- Changing</i>	<i>Uncertainty of Future Plans</i>	<i>Overcoming Adversity</i>	<i>Material Support</i>	<i>Urgency to Get off Futures Tour</i>

Futures Tour profoundly impacts multiple areas of participants' lives. The theme of impact on life is represented by the sub-themes of life-defining, life-consuming, and life-changing.

For participants in the first transitional period, tennis was life-defining, as players were defining themselves and forming an identity as professional tennis players. It was also during this transitional period that players were making initial decisions about how much they wanted to have tennis define who they were as individuals and how much tennis would be a part of their lives. For those participants who made it to the second transitional period and settled into life on tour, tennis became life-consuming, as it was their job and full-time pursuit. For all participants, tennis ultimately ended up being life-changing. Especially during the third transitional period, participants had to make decisions about whether to continue to compete on the Futures Tour or to get a job, return to school, or pursue a graduate degree. Not all participants transitioned off tour permanently, as it was often a matter of transitioning off the Futures Tour for a time, and then back on, depending on financial and other lifestyle considerations.

Uncertainty. Uncertainty is another major theme that was intertwined throughout every stage of participants' experiences of pursuing professional tennis. I could sense and feel the omnipresent hand of uncertainty every time I interacted with participants and its grasp never looked the same. Dean commented, "It's just such a roller-coaster of highs and lows; that's what makes it so tough you know, and why so many guys can't really deal with it for too long." Sub-themes that emerged under uncertainty included uncertainty of success, uncertainty of arrangements, and uncertainty of future plans. During transitional period I, players experienced a great uncertainty of success as they transitioned from college tennis to the Futures Tour. It was during this period that they often went from being collegiate stars to a very high level of

competition where they were one of many junior, collegiate, and even professional standouts. During transitional period II, participants experienced uncertainty of arrangements as their lives were constantly in a state of flux over travel plans, training and doubles partners, and other constantly changing aspects of competing full-time on tour. During the third transitional period, participants experienced uncertainty over their future career plans and the directions that their lives were taking.

Mental Discipline. Another important theme emerging from the data was mental discipline, the need to develop the mental discipline necessary to succeed on the Futures Tour. Participants consistently commented on how important it is to be mentally and emotionally disciplined. As I observed participants and other players, I noticed and recorded that those individuals who were able to mentally handle difficult situations, losses, and environmental factors were able to persevere longer on tour and ultimately have more success. Dean emphasized the importance of mental discipline, believing that most of the players competing in Futures tournaments have good technical skills, yet are lacking from a mental standpoint. Dean's comments are reflective of what I both observed in the field and what other participants shared with me as well:

Anyone playing in Futures and especially Challengers are really good players with really good strokes. It's just that a lot of the guys in the Futures and even in the Challengers are mental midgets and that's what's holding them back.

Dean, in his 30s, is now only an occasional competitor on tour; he has a different perspective after coaching and further studying the mental aspects of the game. Participants repeatedly mentioned that it is the mental components and mental discipline that separate players at the

professional level. Dean believes that many players do not have the mental skills necessary to win at that level:

So many guys don't have the right mind set; don't really know how to compete, and realizing that there's so much more than just the physical to making it in pro tennis. Yeah you know the difference between success and failure at this level is so subtle; it really comes down to who can think better out there and become more disciplined mentally.

Spending hours traveling with and interviewing participants opened my eyes to the many varied ways they work on increasing their mental discipline. Some have worked with SPCs, while others have figured out techniques on their own.

In speaking of the importance of mental discipline, both Troy and Trent emphasized how those players who are mentally disciplined and can play solid consistent tennis have the best chances of breaking through the Futures Tour and go on to the next level. After winning two consecutive Futures during the summer of 2011 and then turning pro, Trent described how his mental discipline helped him win these tournaments:

I wasn't all of a sudden Superman on the court, I felt like I was doing what I had been doing all year, playing really solid, not doing anything stupid . . . there is nothing special about it, just hardnosed tennis, and I mean I didn't feel like I was ready to go win a grand slam, but I felt like I was in a good position to play these tournaments and improve.

Troy, who has also had a lot of success in Futures and was mostly playing the next level of Challengers when he got injured, stated that when playing Futures, "Making balls goes a long way . . . not by overpowering anybody but by not missing a ball . . . really just competing, fighting my ass off, and making balls will go a long way to winning Futures matches."

From my time competing as a player and researcher, I saw how difficult it is to win at the Futures level, although becoming more mentally disciplined is a key ingredient to success. Participants' responses about mental discipline are consistent with Harwood's (2010) findings after consulting with Challenger-level players that "speed of recovery from an emotional perspective was critical at this [Challenger] level." Participants in the current study emphasized how crucial mental discipline was, particularly at this level of professional tennis. Sub-themes under mental discipline include self-reliance during transitional period I, consistency of performance during transitional period II, and overcoming adversity, during transitional period III.

Support. The paradox of competing on the Futures Tour is that as much as participants had to learn mental discipline, they also needed various forms of support in order to have success and remain on tour. Dean commented, "I mean you don't see the entourages of people that surround the top players at the Grand Slams; it's just not feasible at the lower levels." Despite not having large traveling "entourages," it was essential for participants to find various forms of support. This is consistent with Rees, Ingledew, and Hardy's (1999) assessment that for high level athletes "clearly, benefits of social support should not be underestimated" (p. 427). Participants were constantly working to find the necessary support to enable them to continue pursuing professional tennis during all three transitional periods. While previous research identifies the need for social support, this study identifies more specifically the different types of support that Futures players need at the different transitional periods of their professional careers. These are represented by the sub-themes of emotional support, structural support, and material support.

During transitional period I, players turned first and foremost to emotional support from fellow players, family members, and significant others. During the second transitional period, players looked to structure support through finding training and doubles partners, coaches, and training bases. In the third transitional period, participants looked most to material support in order to continue pursuing tennis at the professional level. Often those participants who could not obtain the necessary material support during that third period were those who dropped off the tour. Interestingly, something that I had not anticipated when beginning my ethnographic fieldwork was that I would not only need to seek out my own network of support, but that I would become part of other players' support system, which became very apparent to me by the end of my fieldwork.

Urgency. Urgency was a theme that united the experiences of participants, who all felt urgency at different periods of their time as professional tennis players. Participants felt urgency about the impact that the tour would have on their lives, urgency about time, and urgency about finding resources. Because many professional tennis players retire before or by age 30 (Geyer, 2010) and the average professional tennis career is only seven years (Russell, 2010, p. 5), participants recognize that they have a fairly short window in which to play tennis at the professional level.

During transitional period I, participants who had been in college for at least four years felt an urgency to get out onto the tour and start competing against many players who were younger than they were. During transitional period II, participants felt the greatest urgency to find a way to remain on tour in order to have the time to develop and move up the ranks of professional tennis. And, finally, during transitional period III, participants felt an urgency to

either move on to the ATP Challenger circuit or main tour events, or make the choice to move on to other pursuits related to career (“getting a real job,”), family, and relationships.

Transitional Period I: Going from College to Pro Tennis

During this initial period of time, participants transitioned from playing college to professional tennis. The following sub-themes highlight the players’ experience of leaving the world of college tennis and competing on the Futures Tour. It was during this time that participants were defining themselves as professional tennis players and moving from their college identity to the Futures Tour. In addition, it was during this first transitional period that participants encountered a much greater uncertainty about success than they had experienced in college, as they went from winning most of their college matches to losing more matches than they typically won. For some, like Sam and Rick, this sense of loss also led to a loss of motivation and the eventual decision to no longer pursue tennis at the professional level. For Carl, Sam, and Trent, all less than a year removed from their college tennis days, the transitional process from college tennis to the Futures Tour was very immediate. Other participants such as David and Troy had transitioned onto the Futures Tour, returned to finish their degrees, and then transitioned back or were planning to transition back onto the tour. Whether currently embedded in transitional period I or looking retrospectively back on it, participants also emphasized the importance of self-reliance during this stage, seeking out emotional support, and feeling an urgency to get on the tour and start competing.

Impact on life: Life-defining. Participants, like Rick, mostly played at universities with a strong tradition of success, national rankings, and a history of producing professional players. Rick described how when the new coach first met with the team and asked which of the players

wanted to be professional tennis players after college, all of them raised their hands. In other words, for the most part, participants in this study came out of collegiate programs where the culture of the program was geared towards being a professional tennis player. Dean stated, “Honestly playing at a school like mine, you were practicing with a bunch of guys who were looking to go pro,” many of whom went on to have successful careers. Rick stated that in his experience, most top level collegiate players initially have a similar ambition:

Every guy wants to play pro; they have the ambition to; that’s why you play junior tennis. I mean it’s not easy; you have to go through a lot like home school, separate your time, not hang out with your friends as much; it’s really a huge time commitment, and you don’t want to just throw that away after college, and not try and do anything with it. So everyone wants to, but it just depends if you can make it through college still liking tennis. I mean a lot of guys burn out; they just don’t do it anymore, and then they just quit. A few guys realize they aren’t just good enough, or they like to do other things better, a couple of guys are kind of naive and keep playing because they think that is what they are supposed to do and they get stuck out there.

Understanding the college tennis culture that participants come out of, as well as their own cultural background, helps in understanding their decision to continue pursuing tennis and having it be a defining aspect of their lives.

Although Rick has decided not to continue playing Futures, he understands those who continue to define themselves principally as tennis players, realizing the individual nature of such choices:

Yeah, those guys love playing, and they still feel like they can improve and get better, and see their full potential blossom, and they'll do anything to see that happen. You know it's all about personal value and what you want to do, and if you enjoy it . . . you know it's a very personal thing.

Messner (2005) has written about how men at the age of many of the participants are trying to define who they are: "Surely there is nothing unusual about a man in his mid-20s 'stumbling' around and looking for direction in his work and his relationships. That is common for men of his age" (p. 304). Participants chose to define themselves as professional tennis players and pursue that direction of work, although it is a tenuous situation as they choose to define themselves at a level of sport that offers little financial incentives or recognition of any kind.

For participants transitioning onto the Futures Tour, tennis became a life defining event for them. When their former college peers were taking first jobs or going onto graduate school, participants were hitting the road, traveling around the U.S. and other parts of the worlds pursuing tennis. A number of participants mentioned that there are aspects of the tour which are very fulfilling to them and which keep them out there pursuing the game as a career. Despite the difficulties, many participants shared with me how much the tour means to them and how it defines them as a person. David commented, "It's a journey, it's not a destination, and this is my way of learning these life skills, and you know honestly that's the most fulfilling part about it, and that's why I don't want to stop." David was a top junior and All-American tennis player and has not had the same level of success up to this point on the Futures Tour that many expected of him. However, tennis is his passion, and he has an enormous drive to continue pursuing tennis at the professional level.

For David, in addition to seeing the life lessons that he is learning playing professional tennis, it is obvious that there is nothing else that he wants to be doing with his time:

It's fun, it's basically I mean my life is a road trip with my friends and that's fun. You know being with my buddies and traveling around and meeting families, all that is the good part of this lifestyle.

Having spent hundreds of hours with David on the practice court and at tournaments, I believe that he truly enjoys what he is doing.

Similarly to David, Dean shared that despite the difficulties of playing Futures and Challenger tennis, there is still something enjoyable about the process:

You know even though it's a job and pretty cut throat out there, you have to enjoy at some level the fact that you're getting to play a bloody sport for a living. I mean you think about all the crappy jobs that you could be doing and you're getting to play a sport, you're getting to compete, that part is great.

Troy, who missed all of last year due to injuries, is eager to get back on tour because there is an excitement and challenge to the life that he misses:

Well I mean I just like playing. I like playing, I like competing, and I like the challenge of trying to beat someone. I hate the actual travel part but I love visiting new places around the world, who doesn't really, you learn about different cultures, places around the world so what is there not to like I guess. Anyone who complains about that has a problem I'd say.

Jackson also likes playing and treats every tournament like it's his last. He shared with me, "I hope it's not the end because I really like what I'm doing."

Uncertainty: Uncertainty of success. The majority of participants experienced a certain uncertainty of success due to losing many matches when first transitioning onto the Futures Tour. The top collegiate players, including those in this study, expected to win most of their matches in college. Each went through junior and college tennis with impressive win/loss records. The average top college players win more than 30 college matches per year and typically have winning percentages well over 70 percent (Russell, 2010). Participants had won numerous college tournaments, conference championships, and All-American honors. One participant had been the #1 collegiate doubles player during his final season, two participants had made the semi-finals of the individual NCAA tournaments, most had held All-American distinctions, and all had winning records over the course of their collegiate careers. In summary, all were used to winning—and winning often.

When participants began competing on the Futures Tour, they had to realize that winning would not come automatically nor immediately. A typical Futures tournament consists of either a 64-player or 128-player qualifying draw that determines a certain number of players who then earn spots in the 32-player main draw of the tournament (ITF, 2012). With a qualifying draw of 128 and a main draw of 32, there are often as many as 150 players competing in the tournament; yet, there is only one winner. So, 149 of those players lose, many losing the first round of qualifying and not winning a single match. As Jackson stated, “We’re all losers, 149 of us pretty much, and you’ve got to be able to deal with losing consistently.” This is consistent with Marks (2006) who also found former college players struggling, mostly on the Challenger tour, with losing records, a far cry from their collegiate days.

After finally breaking through and winning his first Futures tournament in singles, Jim said:

You realize that there are often 129 guys just in the qualifying alone and then another 32 in the main draw. So, about 150 guys are going home a loser every week. So, to be the winner at the end of one of these tournaments is pretty great.

To go from winning most matches to losing most is a difficult transition, and most college players, especially those who have not competed in Futures tournaments before leaving college, struggle with the uncertainty of not being as successful as they had been at the junior and college levels.

Describing this uncertainty of success that players have to deal with, Rick also emphasized that players typically struggle because they do not have the success that they are used to having in college, and they have to learn to deal with losses:

You know I think a lot of guys will get discouraged quickly, and if they really want to play pro, then they just can't get affected by whether they have success or not in the first starting out period. I know a lot of pros unless you're top 10 your winning percentage is like 40%; I mean you just don't win every match, you lose a lot, so you have to try to stay tough through the hard times.

In a very real sense, players have to learn to be losers. They also have to accept the reality that they are not going to be consistently winning week-in and week-out. Trent mentioned that in college he would just forget about his losses as they did not happen very often. Yet, on the Futures Tour, this strategy did not work. He spoke about the danger of focusing too much on

loss and cautioned that if “you spend the next three days sulking about the loss, then you’re not going to be ready for the next week.”

Sam referred to one aspect of this uncertainty of success as the “one and done concept” of Futures tournaments, and he struggled with the difficulty of traveling to a tournament, losing the first match, being through with the tournament, and then going on to the next. He provided the following advice to players starting out on the Tour: “You’ve got to be ready for the emotional toll, and it takes a strong will, . . . you’ve got to be ready for the toll that it’s going to take, and you can’t get down on yourself.” This emotional toll comes from losing, often in the first round of the qualifying, and not being able to get back on the court the next day and play another match, but having to wait at least another week.

With very few ranking points and little prize money available, the Futures Tour is an inhospitable place for a player starting out in professional tennis. David described the Futures Tour as “as system designed for you to quit.” Although all participants had been involved in tennis from a very young age and been successful junior and college players, there was little certainty of such success on the Futures Tour. Those who compete on the Futures Tour have the goal of using it as a stepping stone to get to the next level of professional tennis—the Challengers or ATP events, but they soon learn that it is extremely difficult to make that step. Eitzen (2005) argues that “while the possibility of staggering wealth and status through sport exists, the reality is that dramatic upward mobility through sport is highly improbable” (p. 249). For most collegiate tennis players making the step to a successful professional career is something that they will never make; this remains incredibly difficult to accept (Marks, 2006). For some participants, this uncertainty of success started when they realized how competitive the

Futures Tour was, and for many, this uncertainty leads to the decision to no longer continue competing on the tour.

Kurt, who had been ranked in the top 50 in the world as a junior and had played four years of college tennis at a top Division I tennis program, went to another country after graduation to begin competing in Futures tournaments. He was surprised at how difficult it was, much harder than he thought that it would be. He learned that it was hard to even get through the qualifying rounds and into the main draw of the Futures: "I thought that the qualies was not going to be as hard as it was. I thought it might have been easier than it was." Kurt also explained the difficulty of playing Futures tournaments, when even in the qualifying rounds, it is like playing the #1 player from top colleges in one match after another, with no real break or rest in between. This makes the transition from college to professional tennis very difficult: "I think that everybody out there on the Futures are like the top in college and they're all in a pool and they're all playing each other." Describing the difference between college and professional tennis, Kurt emphasized that college players must be "physically and mentally superior, but when you get to the pros that's not enough; you need to be even more solid; there is more of a fine tuning process there."

Uncertainty of success also arose from a different pressure that participants described feeling when they began playing Futures. Sam identified this pressure and how it affected the outcome of his first match:

It's really different especially in my first tournament, lost in 3 sets to a guy that I would normally beat in straight sets you know because it's for something more so there's a different pressure, it's also for something more because you're playing against guys who

are traveling the world trying to get points and basically trying to earn a living. I mean it is a lot of pressure and it definitely it got to me.

Rick also emphasized that a lot of the uncertainty of success comes from a pressure to have success as career livelihoods are on the line. He emphasized that many do not handle this constant pressure well: "Winning for money is something that a lot of guys pressure out about, like 'I need to win this match to be able to go to the next tournament,' and whether they can handle that is a big factor." In his case study on a Challenger level player, Harwood (2010) commented that "the professional tennis circuit . . . can be both brutal and demoralizing for the self-employed player" (p. 8) and contributes to an ever-present feeling of uncertainty.

Uncertainty about success also stemmed from participants' varied college experiences. While some participants like Carl and Troy struggled after leaving college tennis, other participants looked forward to no longer being defined and limited by college coaches, teams, and identities, even though this often added to their uncertainty about the future. Fisher and Anders (2010) identified how important it is "to examine the myriad of ways that athlete identities are fragmented, multiple, and dependent upon location in matrices of power" (p. 11). College athletics and, specifically, collegiate tennis programs can act as these matrices of power as some participants felt that they had been pigeonholed into a certain position on a team that affected their identity as a tennis player. Kurt spoke of how the power matrix of college tennis was difficult for him:

Psychologically, it's hard because the coaches feel like they have their "favorites" and you know who their favorites are, and if you're not one of their favorites, then you start second-guessing how good your tennis is . . . so, then you start to ball your own self,

okay, "Screw this, I'm not going to listen to any of this". . . it's totally different from a guy who's never been to college, they're just totally different guys because they've got totally different mentalities, and I feel like that's a big time difference.

In some cases, the uncertainty of success that participants experienced was closely tied to their college tennis experiences. Carless and Douglas (2009) wrote that "stories, identity, experience, and psychological health are inter-related and influenced by biographical, historical, and socio-cultural factors" (p. 52). The stories that participants shared about their collegiate tennis experiences show that although it was difficult to leave the resources and structure that collegiate tennis provided, for some it was also very liberating to be freed from the college tennis identity.

Even though he was an All-American college player, David also left college disappointed with where his game was. He had a lot of uncertainty about his chances to have success at the professional level, even though that had been his goal from the time that he was young:

Yeah, you know I have a choice. You know I can either look at my college career and go, "Man? you know, I'm not as good as I thought I was and maybe I should do something else," or, I can go, "Okay, let's learn from that. What didn't I do? or Why did this happen?" and I choose to look at it as I went through all these things . . . I mean college tennis is the best thing that could have happened to me because it didn't break me; I'm still playing.

Kurt, David's teammate from college, also felt that losing the college identity was important yet very difficult to do:

You know I think the mentality of college is sometimes too much team, and I think like say with David and me, we mentally got psyched out a little because a lot of the time we

played in the #4 or #5 positions, but really we're out there trying to become professional tennis players.

Kurt felt that the college experience and coaches' expectations caused them each to have less belief in themselves and their ability to succeed in professional tennis.

According to Smith (2010), coaching expectations can affect the behavior of coaches towards players, and Kurt felt that coaching expectations in terms of position and ability were dictated by pressure to win, not by the best interests of players: "That's their business, so they don't care how they conduct their business, they just want to win, no matter how they win, and that neglects and sacrifices the integrity of the players." Although David felt like he had moved on, Kurt still thinks that his former teammate and good friend suffers a bit from this college mentality: "He [David] knows he's good enough, it's just that little in the back of your mind, I feel college does that to you, it's like, 'Ah you're probably not good enough' because of just all the stuff that happens in college." Kurt believes that a player like 6'9" John Isner, one of the top U.S. professional tennis players, can make this kind of jump more easily to the higher level professional events because of his physical advantages and weapons:

I think playing college and then going pro, I think only a player like Isner, because he's like 6'9" can do it, but the other guys like a 6' foot someone are not really succeeding, even the top guys, because the mentality, and I don't believe the coaches in college are that great.

Mental discipline: Self-reliance. The theme of becoming self-reliant was an aspect of life on the Futures Tour that participants emphasized repeatedly, especially during the first transitional period of starting out on the Futures Tour. Although some participants initially

struggled with having to be fiercely independent and self-reliant after leaving college tennis, they quickly realized the necessity of doing so. David commented on the necessity of Future players learning to become self-reliant: "Futures players make their own travel plans, they're their own coaches, so we're everything, we're all in one . . . we have to learn to do all that." Self-reliance was essential for participants competing on the Futures Tour because all participants unanimously agreed that tennis is a very mentally and emotionally challenging sport. As Jackson stated, tennis is "a very mental game," with the mental battle taking place both on court as well as traveling on the tour for weeks at a time. He felt that 80% involves "the mental or emotional attitude and just trying to really remember what your focus is," which is to improve and move up the ranks of professional tennis. Trent described how even though he is training and traveling with a former college teammate who also turned pro, it is still of critical importance to be self-reliant: "You're by yourself a lot, or you're with one guy a lot . . . but he's on the court all the time, too, so there's no one to look to but yourself."

Troy also described why it is so essential to become self-reliant. When he first went out on tour, he said that he had no idea how to structure his time, put together his schedule, and take care of every aspect of life on the tour. Although he got advice from others and continues to do so, he also realized that, ultimately, a player has to be responsible for himself. Speaking about scheduling on the professional tour, Troy stated:

There is quite a lot to it in terms of what your favorite surfaces are, what your body can handle, how many tournaments in a row you can play, when you are going to have your off weeks, when you are going to have training blocks, and all that type of stuff comes into play.

Troy described his first attempt at putting his schedule together as being “horrendous”; he has become much more self-reliant and professional in every aspect of his life as a professional tennis player. This concept of self-reliance appears closely tied to autonomy, in the sport psychology literature, where “you are an agent unto yourself . . . in control of your destiny and your actions” (Cox, 2012). Self-reliance is commonly cited as being essential for all high-level athletes (Cox, 2012; Duda & Treasure, 2010).

Participants mentioned how important it is to work on becoming self-reliant early in the process of playing on the Futures Tour, even though it is something that they continue to work on. David commented that while he has always worked on being better able to control what he can, he is now more self-reliant than when first starting out on tour:

What I’m trying to do is manage everything, manage myself, manage my emotions; that way I want to be thinking the same way when I’m down 6-0, 1-0, as I would be at 4-4. The older I get and the better I get, the more I am taking control of the way that I do things.

Jackson also referred to being consistent with his time: “You have to have your own regimen and be self-sufficient. . . . I end up doing a lot of preparation on my own, so I guess that self-sufficient thing is big.” For participants like David and Jackson who have learned to be very self-reliant, it is similar to the concept of autonomy or “being an agent unto yourself . . . in control of your destiny and actions” as outlined by Cox (2012, p. 64). This autonomy over their training, preparation, and career is something that David, Jackson, and others not only have learned as they have been on tour, but it seems to be an aspect of their careers that they embrace.

Support: Emotional support. Although participants mentioned multiple forms of support, emotional support emerged as the most significant for those players early in the process of transitioning on the Futures Tour. Finding a support system to provide emotional support was essential for all participants, especially after losing the support system of a college team, family members, or significant others. All participants mentioned how important it was for them to find people who could provide them with some emotional support. Rick stated, “You know, I know guys who travel alone, and you know that’s a really quick way to get very lonely and to get tired out traveling, and it’s no fun doing that.” Similarly, Jim discussed how after leaving college tennis, he faced the reality that “it’s truly every man for himself out there . . . it’s hard it’s really hard.” Finding emotional support was essential to participants’ experiences on the Futures Tour, although it was not always easy to build this support. I experienced this first hand as I started playing Futures tournaments and found myself alone with no one to practice with, no one to warm me up for matches, and no one to rely on for emotional support.

Describing the difference between being part of a college team and then being an individual competing on the Futures Tour, many participants emphasized the difficulty of going from being part of a team, where team members cared about them and wanted them to do well, to being on the Futures Tour where other players did not care about them. Jim further emphasized the loneliness of the shift to competing on the Futures Tour:

You go from having a team—a support system where guys not only want you but they need you to win in order to get the team victory, to going out there where guys could care less if you do well. You practice with guys and they may say good luck or whatever, but

they don't care; they really don't care how you do. If it doesn't benefit them, then they don't care at all. It's a lonely world out there, I tell you, a lonely world.

In college, Jim had played #1 for three years for his college team, been an All-American, and his team had genuinely wanted him to do well as it benefited the team and the school. Jim's remarks are consistent with Marks' (2006) research that found loneliness to be a common complaint of Futures and Challenger level players, further emphasizing the importance of finding emotional support. The importance of finding emotional support, as participants shared in this study, is similar to the concept of belonging, which is one of the dimensions of social support as described by Cohen, Mermelstein, Kamarck, and Hoberman (1985) and Rees et al. (1999) that "refers to support in the form of identification with a social network" (p. 423).

Similarly, as I traveled with Carl during the summer of 2011, it was immediately evident to me how hard it was for him being away from support that his college team and family, who lived close by, provided him. A few months after we traveled together, he shared with me:

I mean it was just so different. I really missed my family, I missed my girlfriend so much, and then I mean I missed my team. I was used to having a coach always traveling with me and helping me, and it was hard not having that. I mean I always had the team behind me, cheering me, and I think that helped me to play so much better, yeah, so not having that it was hard.

Some of Carl's struggles may also be explained by his Latino cultural background. Schinke, Hanrahan, and Catina (2009) emphasized that "all cultures have nuances that make them unique" and one nuance of Latino cultures is "*familismo*" or focus on family and proximity. Kontos (2009) suggested that when "Latino athletes are geographically isolated from this extended

support system, they may encounter adjustment and coping problems” (p. 109). Traveling on the Futures during the summer 2011, thousands of miles from his family, and just coming off of his final collegiate season, Carl faced the double loss of both his family and team, making the experience extremely difficult for him. He felt that loss and did not enjoy the Futures Tour experience: “You know, compared to college tennis, it just wasn’t the same. College tennis was the best time of my life, and I didn’t really like it out there [playing Futures].”

Another important component of participants’ emotional support continued to be parents, despite participants all being adults. Eight out of ten participants mentioned at least one or both parents who were emotionally supportive of them pursuing professional tennis. Trent’s decision to turn pro after winning two Futures tournaments during the 2011 summer circuit was made easier because his parents fully supported his decision if he remained committed to working towards his goals. Trent shared with me that “It wasn’t any easy decision by any means, but that support and everything else kind of made it pretty simple for me.” Trent appreciated the support his parents provided, and he enjoys it when his mother is able to travel to the tournaments and watch him play: “I mean she knows what’s going on, she’s not in my business, and she’s a great help too because she’s seen me through thick and thin, so I like it when she gets to come out.” Trent’s comments about the support that his mother provides are consistent with Côté’s (1999) findings on parental support, which indicate that during the investment years (16+), when an athlete becomes “committed to achieving an elite level of performance in a single activity” (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2003, p. 93) and when moving forward to college and elite level, parents can take on more of a role “of follower and supporter” (Côté, 1999, p. 412). This type of support is crucial to athletes’ successes.

Although Trent ultimately worked harder than his brother, Rick, at professional tennis, he still benefited from having Rick, four years his senior, to travel and train with. Trent shared with me that when he was younger, he would go to his brother's tournaments and learned and experienced things that have been important to him:

I obviously wasn't at that level, yet, but I was there watching my brother and could see how all the other players practiced, played, and see and experience all of this, even before I could play them myself. It was beneficial for me to see that and be in this atmosphere before I was playing.

In his study of family support, Côté (1999) also found that "older siblings had a positive influence on the work ethics of the child-athlete" (p. 407). Rick indicated that when his brother Trent decided to turn pro last summer, he and his parents told him, "'Trent, we're 100% behind you whatever you do, just as long as you give it everything you have and don't half-ass anything', and that is what he's doing, and so far it's been good."

The importance that participants placed on emotional support, and the necessity of Futures players reaching out to different sources for this emotional support, is consistent with Rees, Ingledew, and Hardy (1999) who found that "athletes should be encouraged to seek out social support from a variety of different people and to maximize and build on the support currently available to them" (p. 427). Participants looked to family members for this emotional support, reached out to fellow players and former teammates for this emotional support, and looked for it wherever they could find it. Although I didn't do formal consulting with participants, I did become one form of emotional support to some of them.

Urgency: Urgency to play. After leaving college, participants felt an urgency to start playing on the Futures Tour. For many, their goal had always been to play professional tennis so they were eager to get playing. Kurt felt such an urgency to get on tour that he went to play Futures tournaments just a couple of weeks after his honeymoon. He also felt that former college players felt a greater sense of urgency and were at a disadvantage on tour trying to compete against 18- and 19-year-old players who had played little or no college tennis. Kurt told me that if he had it to do over, he would not have played college tennis partly because he felt like he was playing “catch up” to players who had not played college tennis:

First of all, I wouldn't have gone to college because I think college you lose so many years that you could be playing, especially like I was top 50 in the world in juniors. So, obviously you have some potential, or whatever it is. So I would have gone and played.

That's why so many college players don't make it because it's impossible when you're 23 years old to go out for the first time with no points and start battling it out.

Some players' situation had changed during their college years, which was certainly true for Kurt, who clearly felt a greater urgency and pressure competing on the tour after college. Kurt also mentioned that there is even more urgency on the U.S. Futures Tour because the tournaments in the U.S. are so deep with talented players that it is even harder to win consistently here than other places. He felt that even though players could ultimately have success in the U.S., “It can just take much longer than you really need to” when time is not something a lot of Futures players feel like they have.

After two years of college tennis, Trent felt a certain urgency to leave college tennis to turn professional. He admitted that he felt like there was a certain college mentality and identity

that he didn't want to fall victim to. He felt like it would be better in the long run to turn pro and focus solely on tennis. He shared some of the urgency that he felt to break away from college tennis and get started on his professional career and not be held back:

When I first went to school, sometime there's a trap, I mean college is not only good for you, but it's also a lot of fun, especially because I was always home-schooled, so that social aspect I didn't get at home. It's just a different environment, it's a lot of fun, and I didn't want to get stuck in the trap where I wanted to have fun more than I wanted to accomplish my goals.

Six months after Trent decided not to return to college in order to play pro and compete full-time, I asked him if he thought that he had made the right decision. He paused and was careful in wording his response when he said:

I definitely think that I've improved a lot since I turned pro. I feel like I'm on the right path to where I need to be. I couldn't honestly tell you whether I'd be a better player right now or if I'd have stayed in school. If those two people played each other in a match, I can't tell you who would win.

He thinks, in fact, that the "college player" version of himself may win the match because college players are used to winning and expect to win. However he feels good about the place where he is and the decision he made: "I definitely feel like I'm on a good path, and I'm on a good progression right now to where I need to be."

Transitional Period II: Competing Full-Time on Futures Tour

Themes and sub-themes represented in this section focus on the experiences of players after they had gone through the initial transition from college tennis to the Futures Tour and had

settled in as regular competitors on the Futures Tour. Some participants such as Sam never made it to this point, as he competed on the Futures Tour right after college and decided that he did not want to continue pursuing that course with his life. However, most participants, at least for a period of time, were regular competitors on the tour, and the following sub-themes highlight important aspects of this time period for these athletes.

Impact on life: Life-consuming. It was during this period of competing on the tour full-time that tennis became all-consuming for the participants. For some participants, the all-consuming reality of professional tennis led them to re-evaluate if they wanted to continue competing full-time on the Futures Tour, while others realized that the all-consuming nature of the sport was exactly what they wanted to be doing with their lives. For participants during the second transitional period of becoming full-time regular competitors on the Futures Tour, tennis became an all-consuming endeavor. Although participants recognized that they are playing a sport, it is a job that they take very seriously. This is reflected in the ways they take care of their bodies. When asked about the difference between being a student athlete (having to attend class and study) and being a full-time professional, Trent responded that he had a lot more time to rest, and that rest time was crucial to his success:

There's definitely a lot more rest. There's a lot more rest. There's a lot more time to recover between practices or between weights and fitness. I mean instead of going to class, you can take a nap, or make sure that your body is in a better state to perform. On the other side there is a lot more responsibility to make sure that your body is in the best state to perform.

While I was on the Futures Tour, I talked to a trainer who also works with some of the top players in the world, and he told me that it was not unusual for those players to sleep 10-11 hours a day as part of their recovery from training (Etcheberry & Hall, 2006). As a professional, Trent felt a greater responsibility to train, practice, and avoid doing anything that would interfere with his performance on the court.

However, many outsiders question why these players put themselves through this grueling grind for so little money. This becomes complicated at the Futures level because players are treating it as a job; however, it is a job that does not have any real monetary rewards, and players often do not have any tangible evidence to show progress or to support themselves, let alone significant others. David stated that it is not always easy for others to understand the all-consuming nature of the Futures Tour when there is so little to show for it:

I mean the fact of the matter is that if you're on the Futures Tour, you're not making a living and it's going to be pretty hard to have a job, so technically your job is this but you don't make that much money, or you don't make money at all. I think it's natural for parents to worry or your dad to ask you what you are doing, and that sort of thing. I feel like if he understood what I told you in this interview, I feel like he would be way more supportive than he is, but you have to look at where people come from and the way they were brought up, but sometimes it's really hard for the mind to open up that way.

Most of the participants come from middle- to upper-middle-class families and many of them have parents who are doctors and lawyers. It has not been easy for many of these parents to fully understand what their sons are doing, although they were often the reason their child had gotten into tennis. Parents and others often wonder when their sons are going to get a "real job."

David would later tell me that he sometimes wishes that he had a more “traditional” linear career path such as going to law school or medical school as his father had done. He said to me, “You know, part of me yearns for that; it would be easier to tell my dad where I’m at because he doesn’t understand.” As David shared this with me and I saw other participants facing similar situations, I thought about my own father who is still having a hard time adjusting to the fact that I switched from one graduate degree to another, therefore wasting valuable time, although I see all of my varied educational and occupational choices as part of my journey and learning experience. I can only imagine how difficult it would be for my father if I had invested years into a career such as pursuing full-time professional tennis with no guarantee of success and with limited long-term options once my competitive playing career ended.

Uncertainty: Uncertainty of arrangements. During this second transitional period, participants particularly faced constant uncertainty of arrangements as they competed on the Futures Tour. When I ran into Jackson in Florida in January 2012, he had originally planned to play several consecutive Futures tournaments while traveling and staying with a Russian player. However, when I next spoke with him, he had been forced to change his plans:

Yeah, I ended up not playing Weston this because this foreign guy I was traveling with, he got homesick and he was planning on playing for a few months in a row, but I couldn’t play Weston because he decided to go home . . . and so that changed my plans.

Jackson went on to share that his schedule is “very up in the air” and that he doesn’t plan more than two weeks in advance because of uncertainty about travel partners, hotel accommodations, and other factors. Although Trent has a tentative outline planning out his tournament schedule, he also does not like it to be too “set in stone” because there are so many factors to consider: “It

really kind of depends where your ranking is, how you're playing, maybe if you're coming back from an injury, and confidence-wise how you are doing."

While traveling to the Futures events, I was constantly reminded of the uncertainty of so many aspects of participants' experiences. During my interactions with David, he constantly had to find new doubles partners, despite having a lot of success with a couple of different partners. One of his partners decided to go back to school, another partner decided to play more foreign tournaments, and David was left not knowing who he would be playing with:

Yeah, it's not easy. For the time being I'm just showing up at Futures and hoping to find a decent partner who wants to play. It definitely makes it hard to make arrangements because I don't know right now from one week to the next who I will be playing with. I guess this might be a good time to focus a little bit more on my singles.

Other aspects of uncertainty of arrangements involve uncertainty about getting into tournaments, uncertainty about tournament draws and opponents, uncertainty about where and when to travel to next, and all of the other uncertainties surrounding the arrangements that players constantly had to make.

Mental discipline: Consistency of performance. An important sub-theme of mental discipline during the second transitional period involved players looking for consistency of performance that would allow them the success to move up the rankings and levels of professional tennis. During this period of settling in and competing full-time on the Futures Tour, participants were constantly in search of ways to become more consistent in their

performance. Dean stated, "A lot of Futures guys work really hard and are trying really hard, but they are not necessarily doing it the right way or with the right mental approach." While this

may be the case, I found that players were constantly trying to find ways to be more consistent in their performance, and an important aspect of their becoming more consistent in their performance involved adopting more of a process focus. Participants often mentioned how they would get too caught up in worrying about opponents' rankings, thinking about where they wanted their ranking to be, and chasing easier tournaments, rather than focusing on each point at a time, each match at time, and each day at a time.

Dean believes that to be able to move from the Futures level of competition, players need to focus on the process, not the outcome:

So many guys are so outcome-driven where their sole gratification is if they win the point; you can't play outcome, you've got to play process; regardless if you win the point or not, you have to think about and nurture the process: "Did I play that point the way that I need to be playing points? How am I constructing points? Am I hitting high percentage shots?" I mean if you do all those things right, the results will come.

Similarly, Jackson's experience and Csikszentmihalyi's (1999) research on flow in sport support this process focus of working towards "controlling the controllables" and that this "feeling in control conveys a sense of security and power" (p. 127) for an athlete and can assist in performance. Lynch (2001) also emphasized the important role of focusing on the process as "athletes can restore their confidence by concerning themselves with what can be controlled" (p. 156).

Dean described how players can reach the next level of tennis, but they have to focus on the process and not worry about things that have nothing to do with that process:

But it's so easy to flip into that mode of focusing on the fact that you get a bad draw, or that your opponent is playing awesome that day, and really you need to be thinking that these challenges are going to make me better, or going to help me move forward, but it's not easy to adopt this type of attitude, or everyone would do it. You want to be smarter and not just better.

Dean's emphasis on "nurturing the process and not the outcome" is exactly in line with the concept of encouraging athletes to be task- rather than ego-oriented. Harwood (2010) argued that "a task-involved athlete is concerned with the development of his or her competence and uses levels of effort and task completion to assess his or her competence" (p. 12) rather than an "ego-involved athlete" where focusing so much on showing "superior ability" and winning take precedence over the process (Weinberg & Gould, 2011).

Trent also spoke of adopting a more process-or task-oriented focus. He emphasized that players cannot focus too much on wins and losses, but should focus instead on getting better and improving their game:

It's not about the money, it's not about the points, it's a long road if you're hung up on two points here or four points there, or I should have won that match here. I think it's more about trying to get better, trying to work on things. Of course, you want to win every match, but try to find that balance of playing tennis that's going to help you improve and that's going to help you play at a higher level, and still trying to do those things that you do well to try and win the match. Trying to find that balance is definitely a satisfying feeling when you walk off the court and you know you did those things, whether it's a win or loss.

Sam described working with a SPC in college and adjusting his goals to being more process- rather than outcome-oriented. This development of specific goals tied to his tennis and a more directed focus on specific types of performance rather than outcome goals has helped him deal with the losses in Futures tournaments. Sam learned to develop specific goals for matches, so the focus was not just on winning a match, but on working on something and evaluating the match based on how well he did that, not just on whether or not he won:

I mean everyone wants to win, but you need to go into a match having something that you want to execute, or something that I mean, I played one of the best matches of my life and lost 4 and 4 to a guy who now plays #1 for a big school, and I walk away from that saying I played the best match that I could and I'm fine with that.

This is consistent with Weinberg and Gould (2011) who emphasize that there is nothing wrong with wanting to win, and professional athletes should want to win; however, ideally, there needs to be a balance of process, performance, and outcome goals such as Sam was able to get better at doing while in college and then on the Futures Tour.

Participants' comments suggested that self-confidence also increases when they are able to maintain a process focus. Kurt emphasized the need for players to be confident and avoid being distracted by such things as an opponent's record or ranking. He described the common trap of looking up opponents' records, seeing how successful they have been, and then being somewhat distracted or intimidated by their results:

I felt like I got distracted with what's this guy doing, who I'm playing, what number is he, but at the end of the day that doesn't really matter you know, I think that with psychologist that I was working with and I think this is the way that you've got to

approach it is that every single person on a draw is like an X variable, and you're playing that X today and you play the ball and you play that X and then you play the other X, but a lot of the time I was out there I was like this guy is 700 in the world, he's beaten this guy which I'll probably lose to, and if he's beating that guy then I'm just going to go out there and make it a good match. So, the ability to not look into the ranking to be able to just play the ball and not get discouraged by what this guy's done before, and you don't want to get caught up in that because it's a new day.

Kurt recognized that he would have had more self-confidence, especially initially on tour, if he had been better at remaining process-oriented and not gotten caught up in worrying about winning and all the other distractions going on around him.

Participants Trent, Dean, and David all mentioned that part of adopting a process focus was not wanting or hoping for the process to be easy. Dean admitted that he wished that he had learned this earlier in his career because although physically he is not as good now at 38 years old, his mindset and mental understanding are much higher than when he was younger: "The tour shouldn't be easy, it should be hard to break through, you don't want to be part of the masses, you don't want to be stuck with everyone; you want to challenge and push yourself to be better." Similarly, David stated, "It's definitely not designed for you to succeed . . . which is also kind of a cool thing because you have to learn to do that on your own." Trent emphasized that he does not chase after easier tournaments because he wants to be challenged, "I'm not really big on avoiding stronger tournaments and playing weaker ones, especially at the Futures level because if you're trying to avoid guys at that level, then you're not in the right profession." This attitude and the importance of embracing challenges expressed by Dean, David, and Troy supports

literature which suggests that high achievers seek out and are motivated by challenges rather than easier competitions (Duda & Treasure, 2010; Weinberg & Gould, 2011).

Another element of consistency of performance involves what participants described as the importance of learning consistency of focus. For Jackson, this involved being able to “really remember what your focus is on during the match and not letting all the little mishaps or present situations take you off the focus of what your plan is.” For David, it meant learning to deal with each situation that occurs in a tennis match:

The focus has to be on learning how to manage things when things are going well and when things go bad because I’ve seen players who can play really really good, and you can call that the zone, but then one thing goes wrong and then everything—it’s like a domino effect—everything just kind of falls apart. I feel like managing yourself allows you to break through adversity and maybe that’s the zone . . . going out there and managing what goes on in your head.

David stated that because of the complexity of tennis, it is difficult to get into a zone and stay there throughout a tennis match. So, for him, getting into a zone for tennis was learning to manage himself, being able to deal with each situation that occurs in a tennis match. Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi’s (1999) research supports David’s point on flow by arguing that “learning to stay in the present is an essential skill for athletes and coaches wanting to experience flow” (p. 110).

Another significant aspect of players developing more consistency in performance was the importance they placed on routines. In my experiences of traveling on the Futures Tour and interviewing participants, I saw how crucial routines were to the lives of all participants.

Routines included on-court routines, routines preparing for matches, and routines surrounding preparation and training. In describing his experience of winning his first Futures tournament, Jim identified how crucial his routine had become to his success and performance. He got into a routine and maintained that each day, repeating what he had done and finding great success in qualifying for the tournament and winning a total of eight straight matches, including defeating the top three seeds to win the tournament:

I found myself getting into a routine, the same routine everyday—more than I normally do. I would get up and have breakfast, hit, shower, and then read and listen to the play list that I had at the time. I repeated this every day and I found this repetition to be comforting. This really brought confidence. I felt like if I did this before, then I can do it again. So I kind of recreated the same routine and environment surrounding confidence and I repeated this every day. So for me routines were the #1 thing that stands out from that week. My routines became a physical trigger point for my brain.

As I have spent many hours training with David, I have also seen how critical his routines are to how to trains and practices. He meticulously plans out every day, every practice, and every aspect of his training and preparation. He carefully writes down all that he does, keeping a detailed record of it. David told me that planning correctly is very much a part of his routine:

What I've learned is that the better I do things, the more work that I can do. Tennis is like a job, so you want to put in so many hours a day. I write a lot! I write everything that I do down, which takes up a lot of time. I plan every practice that I have. So that takes up time. Again I didn't do all this from the get go. This has been a process to do all this.

David is constantly adjusting and adding elements to his daily routines in an attempt to constantly get better and improve his chances to move up the professional ladder.

Rick emphasized that an important routine for him was to play consistent matches in order to gain experience in pressure situations. He acknowledged that it was easier in college to do this as there were regular matches scheduled every week. However, on tour if players are not getting enough matches in Futures, then part of their routine has to be to play men's open tournaments to find a way to get more matches in. Part of Rick's routines also included using imagery: "Trying to imagine yourself in a big point and how you handle that when it doesn't count for anything, and try to build that confidence." He said it was also important to "get in good shape, and trust yourself, and practice hard so that you know that you're prepared for this."

Imagery was also an integral part of Kurt's routine before matches. Kurt, who had worked with a SPC during college, said that even on tour he continued to practice imagery, especially before big matches. Imagery "defined as using one's senses to re-create or create an experience in the mind" (Vealey & Greenleaf, 2010) is often used by athlete's to re-create images of positive experiences or successful performances (Murray, 1999). Interestingly, Kurt's version of imagery included imagining negative things that could happen during a match and preparing himself for such possibilities beforehand:

I think you know with the whole thing that we did with imagery, I think that it's very very helpful, I still try to do it with big occasions like I will always try to put myself in that situation before I go to that situation and almost envision like the most nervous that I could get and the most anxious that I could get, and even the worst thing that could

happen at that time, and for me to deal with that, and then when I went there in real life and it was any better than that, then that's great.

Routines have long been established as an important component of performance, and SPC and author Murray (1999) speaks of the importance of routines for athletes: "Elite athletes in all sports learn to develop a consistent routine or ritual both prior to and during performance" and further states that "consistent routines also help guard against the situational effects of stress by providing the player with a very comfortable and familiar mind-set" (pp. 58-59). Although most SPCs encourage athletes to imagine positive performance outcomes, Murphy (2005) wrote "imagery can be a useful way to prepare for stressful sport situations" (p. 141) much as Kurt described doing above. Imagery was and should be an important part of Futures players' routines as they compete and prepare for matches (Vealey & Greenleaf, 2010).

Participants learned focusing techniques and routines from SPCs as well as figured out exercises and routines on their own. Jackson was the only participant who mentioned consulting with an SPC during his time competing on the Futures Tour. He credits the SPC with helping him to understand the importance of the mental aspects of tennis:

He taught me how to focus, center my thoughts, how to somehow create confidence within myself by closing my eyes and thinking a certain thought and just trying to make myself feel more confident and little exercises like that, trying to train myself, prevent myself from losing a string of points. It opened up the floodgates to show me how much more there is to tennis and open up the mental or emotional part of it.

Sam, Dean, Jim, and Kurt also mentioned working with an SPC in college and despite the generally positive experience of working with an SPC, the majority could no longer afford to do so once they started competing on the Futures Tour.

Although Kurt did not have the money to continue working with a SPC after college, he remembered things he had learned through his previous experiences. He had learned to focus on not getting too high or low, too caught up in wins, and too down with losses. He credits the SPC with helping him develop the mental side of his game:

I think he really mentally made me more stable and more of a flat line, I guess, level, to not get too excited with my wins, to not get too down with my losses, after every point. It's just like you go to back to the court where there is a neutral circle in a way which I used as my towel, like I always got addicted to going back to my towel because if I didn't, I felt like I wasn't giving myself the full opportunity to win the next point, so it was almost like a religion sort of thing to go back to my towel.

Going back to his towel helped Kurt to focus on each point, seeing the court as a neutral circle where he could return to after each point (Cox, 2012; Weinberg & Gould, 2011).

Despite not continuing to formally work with an SPC, all participants recognized the need to keep working on more consistency in their performance by strengthening the mental aspects of their game. Some participants saw it as naturally happening through gaining more experience on tour, while others actively practiced mental exercises. Jackson described some of the other routines he goes through in order to perform at a more consistent level:

I study as much as possible, I meditate, I try to find a spiritual balance, I'm a Christian so I read the Bible, I do anything that I can to try and find like a Zen moment in my day, and

then I try and every day make that moment longer or be able to kind of control that feeling. If I'm in a match or something and things are going bad, I can kind of say certain words or do certain things that will get me into this relaxed focused zone.

Much like Jackson, David works on his mind by going to a website that he subscribed to which provides him with a variety of brain games designed to increase his focus: "It's not going to make me smarter but it allows me to focus and works on my ability to focus longer."

Participants' methods of working on consistency of performance through imagery, focusing techniques, and routines are similar to Defrancesco and Burke's (1997) findings that "the types of strategies professional tennis players employ most are imagery, using a consistent preparatory routine before serve or serve reception (i.e., mental preparation), relaxation, goal-setting, and self talk" (p. 192). However, participants' responses indicate that their methods of working on building mental strength and finding more consistent performance go beyond these traditional mental. Participants' routines, focusing exercises, and mental practices included traditional psychological skills training (Weinberg & Gould, 2011), but were not limited to such training.

Support: Structural support. During the second transitional period, where participants were settling into life on the tour, it became essential for them to build structural support in the form of hitting partners, coaches, training facilities, and others resources. When Troy took off the fall of his senior season in college to play Futures events, he struggled with the loss of structure and support that the college environment had provided him: "When I took that fall off, I didn't have the structure that they have in college in terms of training and all that, and I didn't work out and train as much as I wanted." This is consistent with Kovacs, Pritchett, Wickwire,

Green, and Bishop (2007) who studied the members of a nationally ranked Division I tennis team to see the physical changes that took place in these players during the 5-week winter break between semesters. These players were given a detailed workout to follow over the course of the 5 weeks, although it was unsupervised as they left school to travel home over the break and the holidays. The players were taken through a series of tests before the break and after, and “the results showed significant decreases in speed, power, and aerobic capacity. . . . These results suggest that a detraining effect had taken place in vitally important physical components for tennis players” (p. 707). The authors suggest that this may be the result of a lack of social support from coaches and team members during this period. Although more would be expected of participants pursuing tennis at the professional level, especially during the second transitional period, finding structure through consistent coaching and training facilities was essential for participants.

Although none of the participants could afford to have a coach travel full-time with them, they still recognized the need to have a training base and receive coaching help whenever and wherever they could. All participants had received excellent coaching in the development of their games either in junior tennis or college and would have benefited from more consistent coaching at the Futures level. Part of Rick’s decision to not continue playing professional tennis came down to the fact that he realized that he needed the support of a coach, not only helping him to improve his game, but also taking care of the many details of travel, schedule, and everything else involved in competing full-time. Rick sees the support, especially with the coaching that his brother has and support from the USTA, and emphasized how important that coaching support is:

So you know a lot of players think you know we've played tennis long enough, we know ourselves well enough, we know tennis, we can coach ourselves for now, we can get ourselves where we need to be, but to make that next step eventually you're going to want a coach to sort of organize everything, and take care of all the little details, but really you just can't afford it starting out.

Rees, Ingledew, and Hardy (1999) explain this dimension of social support as being appraisal support which "refers to support in the form of advice and discussion" (p. 423), which coaches and mentors can provide.

Before leaving college and turning pro, Trent checked with the USTA to make sure that he could train at one of their national training centers and receive some coaching:

I talked to them a little bit beforehand just to see if it would be okay if I went down there to train because that's important because I knew that I couldn't train alone out of home, and that I couldn't keep training out of my former college base . . . so I have my coach at the USTA, he travels a bit, about half the tournaments I play, he's normally there with two or three guys, but yeah it definitely helps.

Troy talked about how important it was for him to have a structure of support no matter where he goes: "I work with a coach when I'm not traveling whether it be here in the U.S. or back home. Yeah I have what I like to think about as a base in both hemispheres, one over here and one back home and that's really important for me." Deakin and Coble (2003) have emphasized the important role that a coach has in helping an athlete engage in deliberate practice, which according to Ericsson (2003), is necessary for success at reaching and maintaining form at the elite levels of sport. Ericsson emphasized that athletes need to spend up to four hours a day of

deliberate practice, though “it is not strictly the number of hours of practice that are paramount for the development of expertise, but rather the actual structure and content of those practice hours with full concentration” (p. 116), something that a coach can assist with.

Troy even spoke of the importance of having two training bases, one here in the U.S. and one in his native country. He also spoke of the benefit of having a coach and his appreciation for a national coach who was willing to help him out:

Technically the coach I work with when I go back home [foreign], it’s not part of his job at all to be helping me; he just does it because he likes to, because he disagrees with our national tennis organization and their process of not supporting anyone over the age of 18 who is outside the top 100.

Other than Trent, none of the other participants receives any coaching help directly from their national tennis organizations and often turn back to their junior coaches for support and help. Participants recognized the importance of coaching and having someone paying attention to their progression. Salmela and Moraes (2003) identified the importance of expert performance and coaching and found “that one necessary condition for the attainment of superior performance is the presence of a knowledgeable and demanding monitor of daily performance activities in the form of a coach or mentor (p. 279). This is why many foreign players travel with national teams that provide them with coaching. The top U.S. junior players competing in Futures events also travel with a coach who monitors their progress. Although they realized the benefit of having a coach, the reality for most participants in this study is that they couldn’t afford to work too often with a coach.

Despite having played on the Futures Tour for over a year, Jackson still struggles with finding this support. He has struggled to find hitting partners because many other players are already part of established groups and often hesitate to practice with someone outside of that group. Jackson is often on his own, does not have others to encourage or help him, and described the difficulty of being on the road:

The isolation of it all, especially when you don't have a group, or a team, or a hitting partner, or a traveling partner, or a doubles partner and you're one of those players that are to yourself, then it gets tough in terms of being lonely out there, and motivated and stuff, and cheering yourself on, and coaching yourself.

Jackson went on to share with me how tennis can still be a very elitist sport and expanded on the difficulties of forming a network of support:

If you don't have the clout, if you're not in the right scene, if you're not at the right club, you're not traveling with the top players and top coaches, then you are kind of frowned upon, and it's tough for you because those players who are established that are out there they may not grant you a hitting session or let you kind of into their circle at all because you're not in that at all. So it's like you know it's an elitist game unfortunately.

This may be one reason why Jackson became an important part of my social support while on tour, and I became a key aspect of his as well. We are also older. Jackson and I, at 31 and 30 years of age respectively, are further removed from our college playing days than most of the participants who often travel and train with their former college teammates. However, Jackson is also African American and from a lower socio-economic status than most participants.

Kurt talked about the importance of finding a training partner who shares the same goals and with whom he could really get along. He cautioned that it is not as easy as simply matching up two Futures players and have form a connection:

I think that it's really important to find someone that's looking to do the same thing as you; at the time David was that, and we started training together and doing basically everything together, I mean you can't do it by yourself . . . after college you definitely need to find someone who is easy to get along with, who is a really hard worker, and who wants to do the same thing that you are doing, to make that transition a little bit easier, because I think going out there by yourself is impossible.

In addition to his wife, Kurt also traveled with some other Futures players with whom he got along. Yet, they did not provide him with the same level of support as David had done.

For those who play doubles, their partners often become an important part of their support system. Dean emphasized doubles, and his doubles partner was his support system. Rick also focused on doubles and always had a doubles partner for support, which meant he had someone to practice with, and he emphasized that it was much harder for those focusing on singles:

I mean nobody likes to be alone, and so plus it's cheaper for gas, and hotels, and sharing expenses, and that's the nice thing about playing doubles is that you always have a travel partner that you can travel with; I mean singles players sometimes go off on their own, that's always really hard.

Those who focus on singles often have a harder time finding the necessary support. Jackson and Jim are two of those trying to make it in singles and do not have a large support

system or even doubles partners to travel with. Jackson also described how aspects of his network of support actually became smaller once he started playing full-time on the tour. Interestingly, his support system became very small because so many of those who had been part of his support system did not support his decision to play professionally:

Eventually when I decided to go hard and become a full-time professional player, I had to let go of all the people in my circle who were negative or pessimistic, so I had to isolate myself from those thoughts and those people as much. Basically my circle shrunk down to just a couple of people from my mom to my girlfriend and that's about it.

Support is something players need to succeed, but it is a constant struggle to find such support.

Urgency: Urgency to stay on Tour. As I frequently trained and talked with participants, I found that those participants who were committed to staying on tour long term felt a sense of urgency to find the means to stay on tour. This was especially true for participants who had been on tour for quite some time and who were trying to play full-time. Despite going back to finish his degree after having played on the Futures Tour initially after finishing his college eligibility, David felt an urgency to get back out on tour:

I have this history of not being able to stay away from playing for very long; after getting my degree I decided to play full-time and that was what I was going to do and that is what I have been doing ever since.

Throughout my many months interacting with David, I can attest to the fact that he was constantly finding ways to keep himself on the tour for longer periods of time. He called me shortly after our interview to ask me some advice about putting together a sponsorship package,

and he is teaching some hitting lessons to top junior players in order to make a little bit of money to help support himself and continue competing on the tour.

Jackson could not logically explain why so many players felt an urgency to compete on the Future Tour, although he recognized that he, like many others, felt an urgency to be out there: “You are like a ‘no man’ and you don’t have much to go on, which makes it weird, because I don’t understand why so many players try and do this, but here I am.” Jackson went on to say, “I know some guys who are really successful from the beginning, but a lot of guys like Donald Young take a while so I need to find a way to keep myself out there.” In my time on the tour, I interacted with participants like Jackson and saw many other players who felt an urgency to stay out on tour, hoping that at any time they would get their break.

Both David and Jackson mentioned how seeing other players experiencing success gave them confidence and hope for their own success. Jackson looked to the example of Kevin Anderson, whose current ATP ranking is 36 (ATP Tour, 2012):

You know I read stories about Kevin Anderson and how a couple of years ago he was on the Turkey Tour playing a Futures and he was traveling around with like a suitcase of tuna, just to get by, and he came back from that tournament and went and played the Futures in Brownsville in Texas, did well at that, and then went from that Futures to an ATP event in Las Vegas, and I think he qualified and got to the finals and since that point he’s been on the top tour. But he was on his own before that point and I mean he was really on his own.

Jackson remains hopeful that he will also be able to make leaps like that and points to examples such as Anderson for support. Troy also mentioned that watching a fellow player do well last

year really opened his eyes to what it takes for success on the Futures and Challenger tour.

David also mentioned that although he knows the higher levels of professional tennis seem far away, he hopes, like Anderson, to be able to skip some steps:

If I keep going in this direction it's going to allow me to skip some steps, and I don't know when that's going to come, because it hasn't come yet, and in a year it may not have come yet, so it's just really hard to tell, but it's going to happen.

Carl also spoke of the example of an opponent who he lost to during the summer of 2011 and whose approach to the game he would like to model:

That last Canadian guy that I lost to was so intense and good on every point. . . he was just 110% intense on every point, there was no let down, no drop at all, so that's where I have to try and get if I am going to have any success out there. I mean he's doing pretty well now, and I know that I could play with him, so yeah I could get there...it's just going to take a lot of work.

Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory suggests that athletes can experience success and feel more confident through vicarious experience or the modeling of others. This concept of vicarious support seems to apply as well to the experiences of at least some of the participants on the Futures Tour. Vicarious support or modeling also had the opposite effect for certain players like Sam, who saw other players doing really well; this made him feel like that no matter what he did, he was not going to have enough success on tour to make a living doing it.

Transitional Period III: Moving Up or Moving On

Impact on life: Life-changing. Change was a constant as I traveled on the Futures Tour and interacted with participants, but it was particularly prevalent during the third transitional

period when participants were either moving up the ranks of professional tennis and away from the Futures Tour or off the Futures Tour and into other career pursuits. Futures players constantly had to make lifestyle and sometimes life-changing decisions about the reality of continuing to compete on tour. Participants were often unsure about which direction they were going to take with their tennis career. This is consistent with Coakley's (2009) findings that "People don't make decisions about sport participant once and for all time; they make them day after day as they consider how sports are related to their lives" (p. 98).

Participants were continually evaluating whether or not to continue playing on the tour and deciding if they had the financial resources, social support, and resources to continue their journey in professional tennis. Three of the participants—Jim, Kurt, and Dean—are currently married; Dean got divorced while he was playing full-time on the Tour, but has since remarried now that he is no longer traveling as much and has settled into a career in coaching. Jim and Kurt had the added challenge of deciding whether to have their wives travel with them. This added complexity to their situation. Ultimately, Kurt decided to go into coaching and managing a club with his wife, while Jim is heading out on tour again in the summer of 2012 for what might be his last attempt at professional tennis.

Kurt married at the end of his senior year of college and immediately competed on the Futures Tour a couple of weeks after his honeymoon and his wife went on the road with him. He stated, "I went to Japan to play Futures the first time, I had just gotten married and so I was just being naïve thinking that I was just going to go to Japan and do well right off of my honeymoon." He and his wife traveled to Japan, along with two of his former teammates, and while he enjoyed having his wife with him, it was more expensive. He emphasized what a

blessing his wife is in his life; yet, marriage made competing on the Tour more difficult: "It may be different to be married once you succeed, but it's really hard to be a married tennis player when you're trying to get into tennis like me just starting out playing on tour." Fortunately for Kurt, his wife was very supportive of his desire to play professional tennis; he described her feelings as: "She knew that's what I wanted and she was 100% supportive of that." After their return from competing in Japan, Kurt's wife went to stay with her parents and Kurt went out on Tour with some fellow players.

When assessing the benefits of traveling with his wife or with a group of tennis players, Kurt felt that when he traveled with his wife, she was sometimes a distraction from his training. However, she also helped him emotionally and acted like his "psychologist," talking over matches and performance issues in ways that his fellow players did not. He stated, "I feel like tennis just getting fit and hitting a lot of balls and just getting match tough was really good traveling with a guy, but mentally it was really good with her." Messner (2005) identified some potential issues as male athletes want a connection to family, but such a connection may negatively affect their athletic performance: "A man may want, even crave, more direct connection with his family, but that connection and the time it takes to establish and maintain it, may cause him to lose the competitive edge he needs to win" (p. 307). This was true for Kurt; he found that when he was practicing, his wife was often in the back of his mind. He thought about her being there with nothing to do, which interfered with his total focus on tennis. It was not always easy to have her on tour; yet, he really missed her when she wasn't traveling with him. In the end, however, with the financial difficulties and logistical difficulties of the Futures Tour, it was very hard for Kurt and his wife to find a balance that worked for them both.

At the time that I interviewed him in January 2012, Jim had been married for about a year and felt like his wife was much more supportive than many of the girlfriends of players that he has travelled with on tour; she really wants him to fulfill his desires to be a professional tennis player. One issue that Jim faced was the difficulty of the lifestyle, one that does not correspond with the religious focus of his life back home with his wife and family. I grew up playing at the same club as Jim and used to practice with him quite a bit. Towards the end of our interview, he opened up to me about how difficult it was becoming to be the husband and person that he wants to be while competing on tour:

You know what when I'm out on the road I just find myself drifting away from the church. You know the guys go out to the bar and I go with them, or Sunday becomes just another practice training day, rather than a family or church day. I have honestly just gotten to the point in life where I have realized that life on the tour just isn't going to help me be the person I want to be. Also being married, looking to start a family, the lifestyle is just not feasible for me.

I went into the interview with Jim expecting him to be excited to go back on tour after breaking through and winning his first Futures tournament. Instead, I was very surprised to find a man in his mid-twenties who is realizing that his priorities and the type of lifestyle that he wants have changed.

None of the 10 participants that I interviewed had children when they were playing full-time, although Dean now has a 5-year-old son and another on the way, and both Jim and Kurt talked about how starting a family was something they were thinking about. Dean is coaching

almost exclusively now, and both Jim and Kurt have taken on jobs as coaches and have cut way back on the amount of time they are on the road playing tournaments.

I did meet a few players on the Futures Tour who were trying to balance having children and maintaining a family life while pursuing professional tennis, often finding it very difficult to do so. One player I talked to at a Futures tournament in Pensacola, Florida, in January 2012 recounted to me:

Yeah, I won a couple Futures event in '09 and got my ranking into the top 400, I was playing my best tennis, and then my girlfriend and I had a little one come along, so I coached a little last year, worked with my dad some, and now am trying to get back out there again. It's a bit harder now with a kid at home, you know—but it's fun.

Although he clearly was enjoying his role as a father, it did not make it easier to compete on tour and I haven't seen his name in any tournaments since.

What struck me was that the moment that many players are starting to have some success is also the time that many of them are getting married, starting families, and facing the realities of supporting themselves and others, thinking about future jobs, and still finding a way to play on the tour. Farrelly and Nettle (2007), in their article "Marriage Affects Competitive Performance in Male Tennis Players," looked at ATP players between 1995 and 2005 and how their ranking and performance dropped after getting married. They argued that this drop is "further evidence that males experience a decrease in motivation to engage in competitive behaviors following marriage" (p. 146). In contrast to this study, Jim and Kurt both had their best success on the Futures Tour while they were married; however, it just became too financially difficult to try and

travel with their wives, and being on the road without their wives was not the lifestyle that they wanted.

Injuries and illness were another aspect of change that often threw the players a curve ball in their journey on tour. Despite the added challenges of balancing married life, Kurt was at the height of his success on the Futures Tour when he developed a serious illness that threatened his life and brought a temporary halt to his tennis career. Early in his career, Dean suffered tendonitis in his wrists, where he would often feel intense pain for the first 45 minutes of each match until they warmed up. Troy has suffered various injuries and illnesses and had surgery on his shoulder in 2011. He had a high enough ranking when he got injured that he will take advantage of a protected ranking (ATP, 2012) when he returns to the tour; however, the injuries have definitely changed things for him.

While many top collegiate players want to go on to the Futures Tour and hope to play their way up to the next level, some make a different choice, partly tied to their identity and how they see themselves. For Rick, he saw the financial challenges of trying to travel on the Futures Tour as being like “throwing money down a hole.” He saw college teammates trying to make it on the tour, not being as successful as they had hoped for, and then becoming tennis coaches or college coaches, with their lives remaining focused on tennis. In no way did Rick want to put down these players, although he decided that he wanted something different for himself:

All of my tennis colleagues at the time they would go and play pro tennis and they wouldn't make it and they would go and teach tennis or become college coaches and the whole life is centered around the sport, which is great, but I just didn't want that to be my life story, only a tennis player. I wanted to break out of that, still trying to do that, so now

I'm getting my PhD; I'm enjoying school a lot and that was something that I hadn't felt in a long time.

Rick made the choice not to center his life on tennis and have the sport define who he is; he found a different focus and has moved on to other things.

Rick's decision to pursue graduate school over continuing to play on the tour shows that some participants do not simply have just a tennis identity. Ryba and Wright (2005) articulated the importance of seeing athlete identities as being a complex interplay of factors and as always changing:

The examination of identity is particularly important and for sport psychology, this translates into a re-examination of identity in general and of the identity of the athlete in particular. . . . We need to acknowledge the multiplicity of identity and to constantly consider our identity as fragmented rather than whole and singular. (p. 204)

This understanding helps to explain why despite all participants being former high-level collegiate tennis players, some participants like David and Jackson continued to give everything to pursue professional tennis while others like Rick have decided to pursue other career or educational paths.

Even still, Rick explained that while many college tennis players only define themselves as tennis players, he thinks they should also see themselves in other ways. He recounted a recent conversation with a former college teammate:

One of my former teammates said to me the other day, "You know I'm frustrated, I'm just not playing well, I don't know what to do." And I said to him that, "You're just not a tennis player, tennis isn't all that you do, tennis doesn't define you, and you can find

other things to do.” He was depressed and not serving well, and I told him that tennis shouldn’t be a depressing thing for you.”

While Rick has chosen to separate himself from tennis, it is very difficult for most tennis players to do so. In giving advice to college players thinking about playing on the Futures Tour, Rick advises them to play if they want to, but not feel that they have to do so: “Don’t feel like you owe it to anyone; I mean go play pro if you want to go play pro and just enjoy what you do.”

Uncertainty: Uncertainty of future plans. Throughout my interaction with participants during the past year, there was an ever present sense of uncertainty about their future plans. Considering that it usually takes “an average of three to four years to break into the top 100” (Russell, 2010, p. 5) for those who are even able to even get to that point, it is not surprising that participants felt a uncertainty about their future and whether or not they would have the time to develop as players. Jackson, at 31 years old and one of the older participants that I interviewed, particularly felt this uncertainty regarding his future: “For me the hardest part is just not knowing how long I can play . . . that fear of not being able to maintain enough time to grow.” A few days before his 26th birthday, David shared that although he feels this uncertainty about his future, he has chosen not to focus on it:

This is a mission and you’re on a mission to become the best player that you can be and my mentality is that I’ll stop playing when that is completed. . . . So there is no time frame, I see myself playing for a long time on the pro circuit. You know it’s scary to think about because just me telling you that kind of gives me butterflies because I don’t know how I’m going to do it for as long as I’m going to need to do it, but I’m going to do it and that’s it because that’s just kind of how I look at it.

David's comments show a certain uncertainty about how long he will need to develop into the player that he believes he can become.

Trent also spoke of an uncertainty of his future and how long he sees himself competing on the Futures Tour. Although he would like to have moved off of the Futures Tour by the end of the year and be playing mostly Challengers, he realizes that he cannot get too worried if this does not happen. He shared with me his feelings: "Goals don't happen on your own timetable; it's normally not how the world works, and everything is really in its own time." Despite an uncertainty about his future, Trent seems to accept this uncertainty, and is not getting too caught up in reaching a certain ranking by a certain time frame.

Jim and Carl both expressed uncertainty over their future plans. Both are planning on playing Futures in the summer of 2012; yet, neither player knows if he will play much longer than that. After I spoke with Jim and congratulated him on his first victory in a Futures tournament in Mexico, he shared with me the uncertainty he felt over his future plans:

It comes down to the cost-benefit ratio. It is really worth it to keep spending all the money, time energy, commitment that it takes to have success and then to have almost no monetary or ranking reward? I'm planning on going out this summer and if I have a lot of success I might reevaluate things—but as of now I'm on playing this summer and then pretty much saying, "I gave it what I did, I had the life as a pro tennis player."

Carl shared with me that if he does not have more success and a better experience than he did last summer, then his professional tennis career will probably be over. In speaking of his

uncertainty over his future career plans, Carl stated: "I'm going to see how the summer goes and then decide if it's time to get a real job or what." In a study of retired Swedish professional

tennis players, Stier (2007) found that often “tennis players eventually [got] jobs as tennis coaches, managers, and consultants . . . and [thus] ensured them links with the world of tennis” (p. 106). This is similar to what many of the participants in this study were thinking about doing and were already pursuing tennis-related careers while they were competing.

Troy also experienced uncertainty about his future plans due to injury. After elbow surgery, Troy’s plans have been in a state of flux as to when he can get back out on tour. Even when he gets back out there, he knows that his body cannot take too many more setbacks:

Yeah hoping to head back this fall [2012] and see how things go. If I play for a couple of years and stay around the 500 mark and I’m not improving, I’ve got to face reality and give it up and try to face the “real world,” I guess . . . I mean I’ve had a couple of big injuries now, I had surgery on my hip when I was younger, elbow problems for the last year, so if I get another big injury that forces me out for another year or two, I probably will have to do something else.

Injury is commonly cited by professional athletes as contributing to their leaving their sport (Cox, 2012; Stier, 2007); this can often be an uncertain and troubling time for athletes.

Rick discussed how difficult it can be to face this uncertainty of future plans as tennis has defined the lives of participants for so long:

I mean it’s scary to get out of it because growing up playing tennis you always know what your next step is . . . when you get out of it, you don’t know what you’re doing, you could be doing anything and that’s kind of scary to be out of that loop. It’s hard to get out of a sport that you’ve played and dedicated your whole life to.

This helps explain why certain participants faced uncertainty about how long they would continue pursuing tennis. Often they would not want to give it up too early, while also realizing that they couldn't play forever and would at some point have to pursue other career options.

Mental discipline: Overcoming adversity. While participants worked on becoming more self-reliant and consistent with their mental performance earlier in the process of competing on the Futures Tour; by the third transitional period, players focused more on their ability to overcome adversity and stay out on tour. Trent, who left college after two seasons to compete on the professional tour, explained how changing environmental conditions often contributed to his difficulties and required patience and determination to continue:

Finding your game, trying to find your best tennis when things are changing week in and week out, different courts, different environments, you feeling different whether you're feeling tired or you're feeling fresh, or you're feeling underworked where you haven't been training much and just playing a lot, or you feel a little overworked where you have been training too much to try and get better, but just trying to put your best self out there all the time.

Fox (1993) emphasized that the uncertainty of environmental factors is a challenge that all players face and that players have to "be aware of how the elements and court conditions affect your play, and use them to take advantage of your opponent" (p. 162). This is something that Trent and some of the other participants report getting better at the more experienced they become on tour.

Trent also spoke of the importance of being resilient and dealing with all the hassles out of his control:

You're tired of traveling, you're sick of being on the road, there are so many factors that are affecting you, to try and block all those, those are things you can control, but you can handle the things you can't like you're opponents, how your opponent is playing, your line calls, the wind, those are things you just can't control, but trying to control everything around you so that you're putting out your best effort and your best tennis on that day, that is kind of the biggest struggle, and the people that can do that consistently get out of Futures and get out of Challengers and they make their way.

Certain participants described the difficulty of remaining motivated, to practice and play at their best when they were on the road for weeks at a time. Jim described the difficulty of being mentally fresh, motivated, and resilient:

When you are on the road for about 5 weeks at a time, it is really hard to be mentally there day in and day out. You know that you have to get out there and give 100%, but when you're mentally exhausted and tired of being on the road and away from family and everyone—it gets rough.

The necessity of participants learning to overcome adversity is consistent with the findings of Loehr (1990), who has worked with many professional tennis players. He stated that he does not work with players on a simple list of mental skills, but that the majority of his work with these tennis players is helping them “deal more effectively with both on-court and off-court stress . . . dealing with off-court conflicts arising from travel, time zone changes, food changes, time away from family, finances, injuries, and parental pressures” (p. 404).

Troy, who currently has a protected ranking following an injury and subsequent surgery, talked about the difficulty of traveling and competing in tournaments week after week. This is

something that Futures players have to be smart about in order to avoid a loss of motivation and performance. Jackson and Schomer (2006) found in their interviews with elite-level tennis players that more than even mentioning specific mental skills, “not one player failed to emphasize, and voluntarily elaborate on, the importance of being mentally strong in tennis, and all of them had some notion of it as entailing emotional resilience” (p. 62). This ability to overcome adverse conditions and situations was essential for participants who wanted to last out on tour.

Support: Material support. As participants lasted longer out on tour and moved into the third transitional period of being on tour for an extended period of time, material support became even more important for their survival. This is one of the reasons why so many participants when they got to this later stage were forced to take other jobs so that they could support themselves. The majority of participants had grown up in middle to upper-middle-class families, relied on their parents emotionally and financially during junior tennis, received tennis scholarships for college, and never had to worry about being financially independent. Some participants found themselves competing on the Futures Tour with very little money and quickly running out of resources. As only one participant, Trent, was receiving any support from the USTA, most participants had to turn to their parents or other material resources for help. Rick described the financial reality of competing on the Futures Tour as being “like throwing money in a hole.” Financial struggles were commonly cited during the interviews with participants as well as during my daily interactions with players. Financial strains were one of the main reasons why Kurt, Dean, and Jim are now coaching tennis more than playing, why Jackson took a long

break from playing on tour in order to coach and save money, and why Sam and Rick decided to go back to school.

David, who has been traveling on the Futures Tour for two years, made decisions about his tournament schedule based primarily upon finances: "A lot of it just depends on finances; a lot of it just depends on just where you can afford to go." He drives to most Futures because of the cost and then also finds housing, especially when he is in the main draw. Housing is typically provided for players in the main draw and David also has family where he can stay. This makes the travel affordable, but David also emphasizes that the Futures Tour, even for those who are relatively successful, does not provide enough money for players to be able to support themselves. He describes the Futures Tour as being a place that basically sets players up for failure because they are unable to get beyond the Futures level and cannot make enough money to remain on the Futures Tour.

Dean was limited in the time he was able to play professional tennis because of finances, and, ultimately, started playing less and less on the tour and focusing more on coaching:

A major factor was that financially I just didn't have the backing to play as long as I wanted, whereas some of these other guys that I was pretty even with in college either had families, national organizations, or whatever that were able to support them so they could just stay out there longer than I could.

He emphasized all that was involved in being able to support himself from a financial perspective: "It's bloody expensive to be on tour; I mean it's not cheap out there with hotels, flights, and all and it's hard to absorb the expenses when you don't have the financial backing."

In my interview with Rick, he compared his situation graduating from college with no financial support to that of his younger brother Trent who decided to turn pro after three semesters of college tennis and did have some outside support. In no way did Rick seem resentful of his brother; yet, he realized the difficulty of trying to compete against players receiving this type of financial support:

You know I think a lot of the players when they first get out of college, if they don't have help from like the USTA who supplies a coach for you, you can't afford a coach. Like my brother he's given a coach by the USTA, he's given money by them to go and play. I couldn't afford that.

Trent decided to turn pro after two years of college tennis because he felt he would have more opportunities to develop as player by turning pro. However, he also knew that he could not expect any sponsorships to finance his efforts. He emphasized that only the NCAA singles champion could realistically expect to receive any sponsorship, but others certainly could not, as he candidly shared with me:

You know it's really hard for a college tennis player to come out of college and land a big contract with anybody. . . . If you're 17 that's great, but if you're older, as far as sponsorships go it is really hard. Whether I turned pro when I did or by waiting a year, I knew that the financial struggles are going to be there, that's what I knew.

Fortunately, Trent arranged to go to a USTA training facility where he shares an apartment with a former college teammate who has already turned pro and is training there. According to the USTA (2010) manual for players considering playing pro, "you have to be ranked around 164 in

the world on the ATP Tour to simply break even from prize money alone” (p. 3), showing the difficulty for players who do not land some assistance with training and coaching.

Sam traveled to tournaments with a few players he had known from his days of playing junior tennis. The only way he could afford to travel to Futures tournaments was to split the costs with other players; there was no way he could have done it on his own. He described the lack of money on the Futures, something made even more difficult for those having to get through the qualifying rounds to even get into the main draw of the tournament:

Yeah, you know if you win the main draw you get like \$2,000, which maybe covers your expenses and maybe you make \$500, but you don’t make anything if you have to qualify for the Futures and then win the tournament. Maybe if you go there four or five days later when the main draw starts you can win it from there. You want to make it as short as possible before you start playing Challengers. I mean it’s tough, especially doing it in the US; it’s the hardest place to do it.

Loss of financial support and resources make it very difficult for players competing on tour because financial concerns were a daily issue for players on tour. The following scene is reconstructed from my reflexive journal entry I recorded one day after practicing with David, which highlights the daily financial struggles that Futures players face, unlike when they were student athletes and had all their meals provided:

As I finished our practice, David asked me “Where are you going for lunch?” I responded, “I’ll probably just stop at Subway and grab a \$5 foot-long on my way home.” “Yeah, I guess I’ll just fix myself another PB&J when I get home,” he replied. “Yuck, I haven’t had a peanut butter sandwich since I was 5 years old and plan to never have on

again,” I told David with a look of disgust on my face. “Seriously, man, you don’t eat PB&J’s?” David looked at me incredulously. “Not if I can help it,” as I wrinkled my forehead in disgust just thinking about the gobby peanut butter sticking to the roof of my mouth and making me want to gag. “I don’t know how I would survive without PB&J’s,” David retorted, not fazed by my obvious disgust at even the thought of these PB&J’s becoming a staple of my diet.

“What do you do for food when you’re on the road?” I asked David. “Yeah you know it’s not easy because I want to eat healthy but it gets expensive.” “No doubt,” I responded. David continued, “You know I always try and get a place to stay that provides breakfast, I’ll do sandwiches for lunch throughout the day, and then try and get something decent for dinner. I try and survive on \$20 a day, which isn’t easy but it’s doable. I just don’t have a lot of variety and it’s hard to get much fruit or vegetables for that price.” *\$20 a day. A professional athlete trying to eat well on \$20 a day, I thought to myself. \$20 a day and trying to be at your peak performance level!*

Marks (2006) talked about how difficult it is financially the first year or two where players have to not only pay for food but “for items such as travel, lodging, equipment, and tournament entry fees” (p. 101), all of which were covered in college.

As the Futures Tour offers very little prize money payout (USTA, 2012), players are constantly searching for the resources and means to stay on tour. Participants were constantly looking for ways to find material support and to cut costs. Dean stated, “Some of the guys aren’t who you want to spend too much time with, but at the same time you can’t survive without them, splitting costs, practicing with, and chipping in together, so it’s rough.” Despite being adults, a

number of participants relied on financial support from their parents in order to continue competing on tour. Côté, Baker, and Abernethy (2003) identified the important role that parents play in supporting expert athletes in their endeavors. For Futures players, this support often has to include financial support because otherwise players would not be able to continue.

Although I constantly saw participants taking on coaching jobs and hitting lessons and searching for sponsorship packages, as encouraged by Marks (2006), participants often had to rely on material support from other sources. Rees, Ingledew, and Hardy (1999) referred to this type of material support as tangible support and argued that “its influence could be extremely important, given the excessive cost of pursuing a career on the tennis circuit” (p. 427). When I travelled on the tour with Carl during the summer of 2011, his father helped him pay for some of the costs, and we stayed at my parents’ condo in between tournaments in order to save money. My mother travelled with me to Futures events in Plantation and Weston, Florida, in January 2012 in an attempt to help me save money as my funds continued to dwindle after months of travel and trying to live on a graduate student stipend.

Jim stated that the material support of his parents had not really changed from junior tennis because the costs of playing on the Futures Tour are closer to junior tennis than in college where everything was paid for:

It is still my parents who have been huge. They have backed me this whole time financially as well as been very supportive of me going for it. They are all for it and have said to me ‘live your dream’ so yeah my family has been really awesome.

Jim has also benefited from having an aunt who works for an airline company and helps him with travel deals. Practicing with David the day after his 26th birthday, I asked him part jokingly

what he got for the big occasion, and he answered, "My parents gave me health insurance for the year, man," of which he was most appreciative. Jackson mostly travels to tournaments where he can get discounted hotels because his aunt works for a major hotel chain.

David, Trent, Rick, and Troy mentioned how much they appreciate being at tournaments that provided housing, which some of the U.S.-based Futures do for main draw players, while others do not. David stated that by playing in U.S.-based tournaments, he typically has had housing provided:

I've been lucky because I've been traveling with guys in the main draw so I've been getting housing even when I'm in the qualies, and you know I've got a big family so I've got family all over the place that I've been able to stay with, so very rarely have I had to stay in a hotel for qualies and then move into a house.

Trent has benefited from material support provided by the USTA which has helped him out. David and I have been fortunate to be able to train at a club owned and managed by his junior coach who gave us access to courts whenever we needed them and who never made us pay for expensive indoor courts and training time.

However, Dean shared the desperate measures that he and some fellow players went to when their housing arrangements at a tournament fell through:

We stuffed 8-10 guys in one hotel room. Great deal, like 10 bucks a person, but we literally did rock, paper scissors to decide who would get the bed, and then we took the top mattress off each bed, and then literally the other guys just kind of slept on their tennis bags in the closet or wherever they could fit. We really just needed a place to crash and it wasn't for that long, but this kind of thing wasn't that uncommon.

Like Dean, participants shared (and I witnessed in my interactions with them) the endless struggle of trying to secure funding and material support in any way they could and the constant uphill battle that they faced trying to do this.

Urgency: Urgency to get off Futures Tour. Participants felt an urgency to get off the Futures Tour for a variety of reasons. While Rick and Dean were playing full-time as professional tennis players, they wanted to get off the Futures Tour and onto the Challenger tour as quickly as possible. For players like them who were focusing mostly on doubles, the prize money and ranking points are even less than for singles players, and so they were desperate to move on to the Challenger events. Rick hated the Futures Tour, and he saw it as a place to escape from as quickly as possible. He really disliked having to travel to places he did not want to be. He focused on doubles and tried to get into Challenger doubles whenever possible because the Challengers provided much better money, playing conditions, and points:

You want to get out of there as soon as possible and get to the Challengers; I mean once you can reach a certain rank, you can get into tournaments where you can get more points off the first round, you can kind of keep yourself there; I mean you really want to get yourself out of that Futures area.

Dean shared the same sentiments as Rick: "I mean the Futures are not exactly the pinnacle of the tennis world in terms of how you are treated; money sucks, and some of the locations aren't that great." Similarly, David stated: "People really kind of lose their minds out there" and the "Futures Tour is not someplace that players want to get stuck on for too long."

Other players felt an urgency to get off the tour as they had lost the motivation to continue pursuing tennis at the professional level. Kurt shared, "Personally right now I don't

want to be out there; I think that I've done it and I've fulfilled that part of me. I've lived a very full tennis career." Rick emphasized the difficulty of being self-motivated, of motivating himself to continue training and working hard, despite the financial difficulties of supporting yourself and staying self-motivated enough to keep going. Rick was not motivated enough to play professional tennis; he would practice two hours a day, far below the amount most Futures players practice. He decided that tennis was not the central focus to his life:

I probably didn't have the correct motivation to play pro tennis, I mean at that point I was still really considering it as a career, but I mean my brother, God, he practices all the time, works out all the time, I mean it's tennis everything all the time. I really wasn't like that so much.

Rick enjoyed competition and winning, yet when the extrinsic rewards such as prize money and victory were not there, the intrinsic drive to practice and be out there was not enough for him.

After competing in several Futures tournaments during fall 2011, another participant, Sam, told me that he had decided that continuing to play tournaments and spend money doing so was not going to change his overall plans to go to law school and become a lawyer. He also said he lacked the motivation to continue working for something that seemed unattainable. Although he could have gone outside of the United States to get some ATP points, he realized he still would not have enough points to be able to get a high enough ranking where he could make a living playing tennis. It is a pattern that his father had also followed; his father had played on the satellite tour, the former entry level of professional tennis. He had gotten his ranking to about 300 in the world, but then decided that he would go to law school, get a law degree, and that would be his profession.

It may have been easier for Sam to make the decision to move off of the Futures Tour and go on to other pursuits because his father had done the same thing:

I'm actually kind of glad that my Dad had the experiences that he had, and just the concept that I see the same thing that he did. I mean I could go and play and go to Eastern Europe to get points, but the bottom line is what's that going to get me in the long run, because I'm never going to be at that level. . . . I mean look at Trent who's now around 500 in the world, I've beaten that level of players, but ultimately now he's at a higher level than I am, and I'm fine with that.

Sam ultimately saw the experiences of his father and other players and decided to apply for law school after having played on the Futures Tour during the fall of 2011. Eitzen (2005) wrote that often "a man's early adulthood dream of success begins to tarnish, appearing more and more as an illusion" (p. 307). Sam, who realized that if he could not make it to the very top echelons of the sport, then he no longer wanted to be defined by that sport: "Bottom line is, 'do I have the talent level to be a top 100 player in the world?' Probably not. And, at some point everyone has to come to that realization."

The experiences of participants varied by transitional period, a finding that became clearer to me as I analyzed the themes emerging from the data and as I traveled with and got to know those players who compete on the Tour. Some participants entered the first transitional period and began competing on the Futures Tour, but quickly became discouraged by the level of competition, the expenses incurred, and the difficulties and challenges they faced. Others become consumed with the quest to succeed on the Tour and do whatever is necessary to continue to do all that they can to succeed. Participants changed from one period to another

during the course of this study, with the typical movement being off of the Tour because of the challenges facing them competing on the Tour and the realization that they probably would not succeed in getting out of the Futures Tour as quickly as possible and moving on. Others were injured and temporarily leaving the Tour to return to college to complete their degree and pursue other options. The following chapter will provide a summary of the findings and implications of the study.

Chapter IV

Summary of Findings, Practical Implications, and Future Directions

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight important findings from this study, provide practical implications for those working with this or a similar population of athletes, and provide recommendations for future research. Although the aim of this study was not to generalize to all athletes, it is anticipated that there will be parallels to other sport and performance settings, especially those trying to break into the higher levels of a sport or performance setting.

A CSP perspective is helpful in understanding the overall findings from this study because this perspective recognizes the “cultural nuances that exist and intersect within sport . . . in relation to who athletes are, why they pursue sport, and how they are motivated” (Blodgett, Yungblut, Schinke, & Hanrahan, 2009, p. 90). Although all participants were former collegiate tennis players, they came from a variety of backgrounds, regions, socio-economic situations, and racial identities. The findings of this study are complex and multi-layered, much like the experiences of participants on the Futures Tour.

Findings

The findings of this study contribute to the literature by showing how players' experiences of competitive tennis varied as a result of transitions in their careers. Although participants were all current or former Futures-level players, their experiences differed based on the stage of their career as a professional tennis player. At the onset of this study, I did not realize how important these different transitional periods would be in players' lives and how quickly they would move on and off the tour. This study confirms the difficulty of transitional periods for athletes, particularly a transition to a tour offering few financial rewards (Stambulova et al., 2009). Participants were at an age (ages 20 to 38) where they were no longer expected to

pursue sport for the sake of pursuing sport, as they were trying to make tennis their professional career. At the onset of this study, I did not anticipate that so many participants would decide so quickly to leave the tour and pursue other jobs, sometimes out of financial necessity and, sometimes, by choice. Players on the Futures Tour must be able to accept the reality that they are no longer one of the “best,” learn from losses, and deal with the many uncertainties of their lives and playing situations.

Futures players must also be able to handle the loss of structure, resources, and financial stability that a college tennis environment provides them. If players did not receive financial support, coaching, and aid from the USTA or other organizations, as was the case for nine out of ten participants, they had to secure such support on their own. I did not anticipate the constant struggle that players would face in finding such support. This study adds to the literature by emphasizing the importance of Futures players’ need to secure emotional, structural and material support. Participants especially needed emotional support early in the process, structural support in the form of coaches and training bases in order to continue to develop, and material support from family, sponsors, or each other in order to survive on the tour. The necessity of obtaining various levels of support led to a constant sense of urgency that players felt throughout their experience of competing on tour.

Futures players were constantly looking for ways to better network and find additional resources and multiple sources of social support (e.g. emotional, structural, or material) to help them remain on tour. Players often had to return to their junior training bases and coaches who were willing to provide assistance and support in order to help them achieve their dreams. I also found that some players actually had to separate themselves from negative influences or

individuals in their social support networks who devalued or delegitimized their desires to pursue professional tennis. Interestingly, I also found that players mentioned the use of modeling or vicarious support in pointing either positively or negatively to the experiences or situations of other players. Some players pointed to other players who had “broken through” and reached the next level(s) of professional tennis and used this as a form of support and motivation. Other players, however, pointed to those who had failed, or pointed to players like Roger Federer whom they felt they could never reach, as a reason to stop pursuing professional tennis. For some, there was also the attitude that “If I can’t be the best, then I am not going to keep at it.”

I also found that some had trouble networking and building a structure of support due to the individualistic and often closed-off mentality of fellow players as well as tennis organizations. Although the aim of this study was not to set out to criticize the sport of tennis, Fisher, Roper, and Butryn (2009b) have urged SPCs to not be afraid to “interrogate” and question sport structures and institutions. I love the sport of tennis; however, from my time on the Futures Tour, I realized that those players who were better connected with tennis organizations, coaches, clubs, and management had a much better chance of success. Players without such connections often face an uphill battle in terms of finding the necessary support and resources to make the reality of staying on Tour even a possibility, despite having equal talent, ability, and desire as other players.

Most players were also in an almost constant state of transition as they often had to leave the tour to work another job, finish their degree, or deal with an injury or personal reasons. This constant transitioning led to uncertainty in almost every aspect of their lives, particularly about their chances of success, arrangements, and their future plans. Stambulova et al. (2009) have

found that uncertainty is a common aspect of athletes going through transitional periods between different levels of sport, and participants in this study seem to support this research. Former collegiate players competing on the Futures Tour face constant uncertainty over their schedules, plans, and overall lifestyle. Players often have to make decisions about which tournaments to play based off of where their doubles partners are, which court surface they have the best chance to succeed on, and where they can financially afford to play; this is at the same time they are making sure they have enough time to properly train, work on their games, and stay mentally fresh and motivated. Finding a balance that works for them is not easy—so, it appears that those Futures players who seek out advice of other players, coaches, and sport psychology practitioners have a better chance of finding that balance. Throughout this study, I found that most Futures players would not only benefit from more systematic work with practitioners but that most would really like to, although finances typically prevent them from doing so.

Another interesting finding from this study is that some participants were very liberated when breaking away from college tennis and from what one participant labeled as the “college identity,” as if this were a disease. They felt that they were not given opportunities in college tennis to play at the position that they deserved, which, in turn, left them questioning their own abilities and value. One participant commented that the best part of college was that it “didn’t break” him; in order to survive, he chose to frame this negative experience as a learning experience. A number of participants mentioned that their goal had always been to be professional tennis players; so, even if college tennis had not been a negative experience, they were happy to be to the next step of their progression, even if it was not always what they expected. However, participants were divided on the issue; as some felt college tennis helped

their development tremendously as a player, while others felt that it held them back and that they lost time that they could have devoted to developing their games on the Futures Tour.

The relatively high rate of participants in this study who decided to no longer continue competing on the Futures Tour indicates that many are unable to continue justifying pursuing tennis as a career when, not only are they not making any money playing, but are actually losing money in the process. It is not easy for players to see that the Futures Tour is an investment in their career, although they will have to take an initial financial hit. Despite many players receiving financial and other tangible support from family and/or friends, this can be a difficult reality for adult males who want to be financially and otherwise independent (Messner, 2005), but are unable to do so until they reach the higher levels of professional tennis. This can be a difficult and even emasculating experience for players as they must convince others to support them while convincing themselves that they can make it to a point where they will be financially secure enough to make a living playing tennis. Many participants have faced the constant questions about when they are finally going to stop “playing” tennis and get a “real” job, as if one is only *play* while the other is *work*.

In addition, results from this study show that despite the similarities of most participants in terms of age, tennis accomplishments, and socio-economic class background, their careers all took very different directions. Numerous factors influenced player identities, situations, and decisions. These findings support Smith and Sparkes’ position (2009), in seeing the construction of “identities and selves as both social and individual” (p. 19). While participants played in similar Futures events, environments, and came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, some

continued to identify and define themselves as professional tennis players, while others shifted identities and moved onto other pursuits.

Interestingly, while doing so, they were constantly trying different techniques and ways to work on their “mental” game or mental discipline. All participants mentioned what a mentally challenging sport tennis can be and that it is often the mental part that separates those who make it from those who do not. There was a consensus among participants about the need to learn to adopt a process focus (Cox, 2012; Harwood, 2010; Weinberg & Gould, 2011), emphasizing development as a player rather than focusing on wins and losses. This suggests that practitioners need to emphasize and help Futures players with this aspect of performance. Although each recognized the benefits of a process focus, they also recognized that it was not easy to do so, although it was a characteristic of those who remained on tour. In other words, those who saw the Futures Tour as a “journey” rather than a “destination” and who focused on improvement over rankings, win-loss records, and external rewards were able to remain positive and optimistic about their chances of “breaking through” to the next level. Interestingly, as Futures players could not afford to work with an SPC, they often came up with their own mental exercises and ways to work on improving their mental discipline. These “hybrid” forms of mental training did not always include the “traditional psychological skills” of arousal regulation, imagery, self-confidence, goal setting, and concentration (Weinberg & Gould, 2011).

I entered the field anticipating that players who had won one or more Futures tournaments would be full of confidence and excited about their chances and ability to move onto the next level of ATP Challenger events. What I found, instead, was that while most participants were fairly complimentary towards how the U.S.-based Futures tournaments are run

and managed, they wished that the tour would provide greater financial rewards to players having success. This is because they realized that even winning Futures did not provide them with the financial security or ranking points necessary to move on to the next level of ATP Challenger events. Players had to consistently win in order to have any chance of moving forward; this was discouraging for many players who realized the difficulty of winning consistently against a field of talented players, all of whom were at a similar level, and many of whom had enjoyed very successful collegiate tennis careers.

Findings from this study also shed light on some of the lifestyle factors related to competing on the Futures Tour. The autoethnography and experiential sport ethnographic method provided insights into lifestyle factors that were an important component of players' decisions and desire to remain on the Futures Tour. For example, some players loved the fact that they were pursuing tennis as a career, with the competitiveness and recognition that it can bring. Others found the lifestyle to no longer be conducive to the type of life they wanted to live or the person they wanted to be. Players' decisions whether to pursue or remain in tennis after college were often complex and multi-faceted; however, tennis was and continued to be central to the lives of participants as the sport had shaped their identities, career decisions, personal and family lives for many years.

I found that participants were constantly evaluating their status on tour, deciding if they wanted to continue playing and if they had the financial resources, social support, and means to continue supporting this journey. This supports and expands on the work of Stambulova et al. (2009) on transitions of athletes, which shows that "each athlete career, in addition to its shared features, has its uniqueness related to the athlete's innate potential, motivation, and sport/life

circumstances” (p. 398). As I was on tour, I realized that it was not as simple as I thought to predict which players were most likely to remain on tour and which would transition off, as there were so many individual and cultural factors at play. Some players came to realize that they had fulfilled what they wanted to do in tennis, while others felt like they still were far away from reaching their potential and becoming the players that they wanted to be.

Practical Implications

This study provides many practical implications for SPCs, coaches, and others working with former college tennis players transitioning onto the Futures Tour, and, perhaps in similar performance settings. I had an extended discussion with a music professor who was very interested in reading my study as she sees many parallels to her music students, many of whom pursue professional music careers after college. Practitioners must realize that despite high levels of motivation and desire, some performers (e.g. in this case, tennis) may not be able to handle the initial transitional period onto the Futures Tour; this is because players may not be aware that the tour involves so much uncertainty of success. Therefore, for some players, the best option may be to pursue other career options. For those who choose to continue, the challenge is to help them go about this in the best way possible for them.

As a researcher (and off-duty SPC in the field), it was not my job to tell players what they should or should not do in terms of staying on Tour versus exploring other options. I felt it was my job and responsibility to help athletes think through and sort out what the best options were for them. However, the Futures Tour offers excellent opportunities for practitioners, especially graduate students or those looking for certification hours, to work with high-level athletes while providing service to the field and gaining valuable experience. I never did any formal consulting

that I charged for during my time with participants and other players on the Futures Tour. However, participants often asked me for advice, bounced ideas off of me, and initiated me into their support network. In turn, I learned many lessons from them and gained insights that have benefited and will continue to benefit me in my teaching, research, and consulting work.

Their experiences suggest that practitioners will find in Futures players a population of athletes who are open to mental skills training, willing to try different techniques, and eager to further develop strategies to help them be more mentally disciplined. Practitioners should help players not only understand the importance of all aspects of social support, but help players think through, utilize, and obtain those resources that are most easily available to them, as well as, perhaps, seek ways to break down some of the racial and socio-economic barriers that still exist.

Practitioners working with Futures players or other athletes must be careful not to make assumptions about athletes when going into a session. I went into one interview with a participant anticipating that he would be full of confidence and excited about winning his first Futures title. Instead of being energized, this athlete was conflicted as he expressed how difficult it is to balance his new role as a husband with the lifestyle on tour, where most guys are single, travel together, occasionally go out and have a beer, and live a very different lifestyle than he wants for himself and his wife. Despite winning on the Futures Tour, he still does not have the money to have his wife travel with him, and he needs to win more tournaments in order to have enough ranking points to be able to move up to the next level. This is an athlete who did not need mental training but needed to talk through and express his feelings and insecurities as he faces the possibility of transitioning from tennis. Practitioners working with Futures players

must listen to what they are sharing as success does not necessarily equate with increased drive to stay on tour.

Just as players must deal with the realities of change, practitioners working with Futures players must realize the tenuous position that they are in and that their playing status and decision to continue pursuing a professional tennis career often hinge on very little and can change within a very short period of time. Practitioners must keep in mind that it is far too simplistic to see Futures players as having only one tennis identity (Catina, 2009). Practitioners working with this or similar populations must keep in mind that each athlete has a unique make-up and that interventions or consulting sessions should be tailored accordingly. Blodgett et al. (2009) invite practitioners to be careful not “to assume that mental skills are transferable across all regions and people and that effective service provision constitutes universal strategies” (p. 93).

Results from this study suggest that the USTA could implement tools or programs to better help former college players transition on to the Futures Tour and also help them to network once they are there. Jackson suggested that the USTA put together a database with all Futures players and the cities where they train. That way, when players are on the road, they could look up which players train in that city and get information about how to contact them. This would provide Futures players with a more systematic network of hitting partners and access to courts around the country. The USTA could also consider implementing a mentoring system where more experienced and/or former players could assist players starting out on the Futures Tour, providing them with both practical suggestions as well as psychological and emotional support.

Results from this study also highlight some of the practical implications and contributions of ethnographic methods to sport settings. Using an experiential sport ethnographic design allowed me access to players and the Futures Tour in ways that would not have been possible had I used a more traditional qualitative research design. This insider access and perspective allowed me to not only hear about but also experience alongside participants the challenges, difficulties, and realities of trying to make it at the entry-level of professional tennis. However, this type of research is not without challenges as roles often became blurred, making it difficult at times to remain professional in such close contact with participants. Conducting an experiential sport ethnography provided an extremely rich set of data and also helped me grow so much as both a researcher and practitioner. Including an autoethnography in Chapter II allowed me to capture my perspective as a participant researcher as well as my interaction and evolving relationship with participants throughout this nearly year-long study.

Future Directions

Findings from this study contribute to the growing ethnographic work being done in sport psychology and sport studies, while also contributing the unique experiential sport ethnography perspective. As participant researcher, I was able to participate alongside the other players; this provided me with unique access as I was able to talk with players directly in their sport setting and in spaces where only players met, such as on the practice court or in the players' lounge. Experiential sport ethnography, with the dual researcher/participant perspective, has promise for future ethnographic work, both with this population of athletes as well as others. Many practitioners benefit from having close connections to a variety of sports, and these connections should be used to conduct more ethnographic field work and studies to better understand sport

participants. Ethnographic studies such as this have great potential to highlight the complex interplay of psychological and socio-cultural factors within sport such as those found in the coach-athlete-relationship, athlete-athlete relationships, athlete identities, power matrices in sports, and many others (Krane & Baird, 2005).

Findings from this study also highlight the need for more research on Futures players. It would be interesting to further examine players who play mostly in U.S.-based Futures events versus those who travel around the world. Some participants in this study felt that it was much easier to get established and earn ATP points playing in Futures across the globe, while others felt that it was equally beneficial to remain in the U.S. Additional studies specifically looking at differences in players' experiences in U.S.-based Futures versus other parts of the world would be very interesting to explore further. More ethnographic work needs to be done on other levels of the professional tennis tour, such as the Challenger circuit as well as main tour ATP events. Although it might be challenging to find a researcher/player at the very highest level of tennis who could do an experiential ethnography, ethnographic methods, prolonged time spent in the field or with athletes, could shed important insights about those players who do make it into the top 150 where players have a legitimate shot to make a living playing the sport.

Further studies should also be done comparing the experiences of players in professional tennis who played college tennis with those who did not. Although I talked with some players on the Futures Tour who had not played any college tennis, that was not a focus of my study, nor did I collect enough data to be able to make comparisons and claim any findings. However, a recent article in *USA Today* (Robson, 2012) refueled the debate by the USTA and others about whether the top junior players in the U.S. should turn pro as teenagers or if they would benefit from

playing college tennis. Robson (2012) refers to an entire generation of players who did not play college tennis and turned pro that is now being labeled the “lost generation”; these now 24-26-year-olds have mostly retired or are still struggling on the Futures or Challenger Tours, despite having once been the top young professional prospects coming out of the U.S.

Only one of the participants from this study left college early to turn professional, and it would be interesting to conduct an entire study on those players who finish their college eligibility versus those who turn pro after one or two years. Further research needs to be conducted on transitional periods of athletes and when they make those transitions. It would be beneficial to do further studies looking at more individuals like Trent who transitioned to the Futures Tour after three semesters of college versus the other participants who all transitioned after completing all of their collegiate eligibility.

It would also be interesting to conduct longitudinal ethnographic work where players' careers are followed for years, which is something that I am planning to do with those participants who are still playing and planning to play for years to come. It will be interesting to see which participants, if any, will be able to move up to the Challenger and ATP Tour levels. It will be beneficial to see not only what level of professional tennis they reach, but also how long it takes them to get there. It would also be interesting to follow-up with them through qualitative interviews, observation, and other means to learn of their experiences and journey. I anticipate being able to keep such connections because conducting an experiential sport ethnography allowed me to develop close relationships with certain participants and to form a relationship and trust with them where I can maintain a long-term relationship over time and continue this line of research.

There is also need for studies on former female collegiate players pursuing professional tennis as well as female professional tennis players looking to break into professional tennis at all levels of the game. It would be interesting to see how their experiences mirror those of participants on the men's Futures Tour and how their experiences differ and why. Further research should be conducted on athletes of color within all levels of tennis, as well as tennis players from a variety of countries and cultural backgrounds. Ethnographic research has enormous potential for continuing studies on the sport of tennis, as well as other sport sub-cultures and aspects of athletic experience and identity.

Epilogue

I come to the end of the study realizing that I will never make a living playing tennis nor play at the level of most of the participants with whom I interviewed and interacted. However, as I move on with my professional career in sport psychology and get a “real” job, I sincerely hope that participants such as Jackson, David, Troy, and others can find a way to keep themselves out on the Tour long enough to make it and to be satisfied with their professional tennis pursuits. It may be an impossible dream, and even seem crazy; however, there is something about their pursuit of this dream that reminds me of everything that I love about tennis. There is much to criticize and much that needs to change about the game, and I have tried to not shy away from these issues. Yet, there is something about these participants’ journeys that makes me want to cheer. I salute them for putting it all on the line, for sticking it out when most choose not to, or simply can’t, or think they can’t. There will always be those few who remain, who refuse to give up the dream and settle for a “real” job; these are the players who make the Futures Tour what it is. To these players, I applaud you, to the participants and players who helped make this study what it is, I thank you for inviting me into your world over the course of these many months. It has been a journey, an experience, and a process that I will never forget, and I hope in some small way that I have captured it here on these pages.

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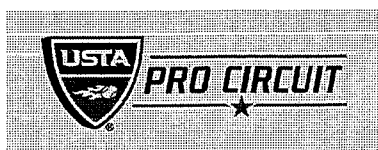
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Appendixes

Appendix A:**2012 USTA Men's Pro Circuit Calendar USA Futures and Challengers**



As of 4/19/12

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2012 USTA MEN'S PRO CIRCUIT CALENDAR

USA Futures

<u>DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>PRIZE \$</u>	<u>DRAW SIZE</u>	<u>SURFACE</u>	<u>CATEGORY</u>
January 9	Plantation, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128 Q	Clay	Futures 1
January 16	Sunrise, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128 Q	Clay	Futures 2
January 23	Weston, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128 Q	Clay	Futures 3
January 30	Palm Coast, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128 Q	Clay	Futures 4
February 20	Brownsville, TX	\$15,000	32 MD, 64 Q	Hard	Futures 5
February 27	Harlingen, TX	\$15,000	32 MD, 64 Q	Hard	Futures 6
March 12	Calabasas, CA	\$15,000	32 MD, 64 Q	Hard	Futures 7
March 19	Costa Mesa, CA	\$15,000	32 MD, 64 Q	Hard	Futures 8
April 9	Oklahoma City, OK	\$15,000	32 MD, 64Q	Hard	Futures 9
April 16	Little Rock, AR	\$15,000	32 MD, 64 Q	Hard	Futures 10
April 30	Vero Beach, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128 Q	Clay	Futures 11
May 7	Orange Park, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128 Q	Clay	Futures 12
May 14	Tampa, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128 Q	Clay	Futures 13
June 4	Sacramento, CA	\$15,000	32 MD, 64Q	Hard	Futures 14
June 11	Chico, CA	\$15,000	32 MD, 64Q	Hard	Futures 15
June 18	Indian Harbour Beach, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128Q	Clay	Futures 16
June 25	Innisbrook, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128Q	Clay	Futures 17
July 2	Pittsburgh, PA	\$10,000	32 MD, 64Q	Clay	Futures 18
July 9	Rochester, NY	\$10,000	32 MD, 64Q	Clay	Futures 19
July 16	Joplin, MO	\$10,000	32 MD, 128Q	Hard	Futures 20
July 23	Godfrey, IL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128Q	Hard	Futures 21
July 30	Decatur, IL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128Q	Hard	Futures 22
August 6	Edwardsville, IL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128Q	Hard	Futures 23
September 10	Claremont, CA	\$10,000	32 MD, 128Q	Hard	Futures 24
September 17	Costa Mesa, CA	\$10,000	32 MD, 128Q	Hard	Futures 25
September 24	Irvine, CA	\$10,000	32 MD, 128Q	Hard	Futures 26
October 8	Austin, TX	\$15,000	32 MD, 64Q	Hard	Futures 27
October 15	Mansfield, TX	\$15,000	32 MD, 64Q	Hard	Futures 28
October 22	Birmingham, AL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128 Q	Clay	Futures 29
October 29	Pensacola, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128 Q	Clay	Futures 30
November 5	Niceville, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128 Q	Clay	Futures 31
November 12	Bradenton, FL	\$10,000	32 MD, 128 Q	Clay	Futures 32

2012 USA Challengers

As of 4/19/12

WINTER / SPRING SCHEDULE			
DATE	PRIZE MONEY	LOCATION	SURFACE
January 23	\$50,000	Honolulu, HI	HARD
February 6	\$100,000	Dallas, TX	HARD, INDOOR
April 2	\$50,000	Tallahassee, FL	HARD
April 16	\$100,000	Sarasota, FL	CLAY
April 23	\$50,000	Savannah, GA	CLAY
SUMMER SCHEDULE			
July 2	\$50,000	Winnetka, IL	HARD
July 16	\$50,000	Binghamton, NY	HARD
July 23	\$50,000	Lexington, KY	HARD
July 30	\$100,000	Vancouver, BC	HARD
August 6	\$100,000	Aptos, CA	HARD
FALL SCHEDULE			
October 1	\$100,000	Sacramento, CA	HARD
October 8	\$100,000	Tiburon, CA	HARD
October 29	\$75,000	Charlottesville, VA	HARD, INDOOR
November 5	\$50,000	Knoxville, TN	HARD, INDOOR
November 12	\$50,000	Champaign, IL	HARD, INDOOR

Source: United States Tennis Association, 2012.

This calendar is updated throughout the year. Updated calendars are posted on www.procircuit.usta.com

Appendix B:
Prize Money and ATP Points for \$10,000 and \$15,000 Futures and
\$50,000, \$75,000, and \$100,000 Challengers

PRIZE MONEY and ATP Points \$10,000 Men's Futures
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32 Draw Singles	Number of Players To pay	Prize \$ Per Round	Prize \$ Per Player	30% Deducted Per Foreign Player	\$ After Deduction Per Player
\$7,800					
Winner	1	1,300	1,300	390	910
Runner-Up	1	900	900	270	630
Semifinalists	2	960	480	144	336
Quarterfinalists	4	1,160	290	87	203
Round of 16	8	1,600	200	60	140
Round of 32	16	1,880	117.50	35.25	85.25
16 Draw Doubles	Number of Teams To pay	Prize \$ Per Team	Prize \$ Per Player	30% Deducted Per Foreign Player	\$ After Deduction Per Player
\$2,200					
Winner	1	630	315	94.50	220.50
Runner-Up	1	330	165	49.50	115.50
Semifinalists	2	260	130	39	91
Quarterfinalists	4	180	90	27	63
Round of 16	0	0	0	0	0

ATP COMPUTER POINTS (Singles)

The following ATP Computer Points are assigned to the loser of the round indicated:

	<u>ATP Computer Points</u>
Winner	18
Runner-Up	10
Semifinals	6
Quarterfinals	2
Round of 16	1
Round of 32	0

No points are awarded for first round loss in Main Draw.

No points are awarded for Qualifying.

The point structure for Doubles is available in the ITF Rule Book.

Source: United States Tennis Association, 2012.

PRIZE MONEY and ATP Points
\$15,000 Men's Futures

32 Draw Singles	Number of Players To pay	Prize \$ Per Round	Prize \$ Per Player	30% Deducted Per Foreign Player	\$ After Deduction Per Player
\$11,700					
Winner	1	1,950	1,950	585	1,365
Runner-Up	1	1,350	1,350	270	630
Semifinalists	2	1,440	720	216	504
Quarterfinalists	4	1,740	435	130.50	304.50
Round of 16	8	2,400	300	90	210
Round of 32	16	2,820	176.25	52.87	123.38
16 Draw Doubles	Number of Teams To pay	Prize \$ Per Team	Prize \$ Per Player	30% Deducted Per Foreign Player	\$ After Deduction Per Player
\$3,300					
Winner	1	945	472.50	141.75	330.75
Runner-Up	1	495	247.50	74.25	173.25
Semifinalists	2	390	195	58.50	136.50
Quarterfinalists	4	270	135	40.5	94.5
Round of 16	0	0	0	0	0

ATP COMPUTER POINTS (Singles)

The following ATP Computer Points are assigned to the loser of the round indicated:

ATP Computer Points

Winner	27
Runner-Up	15
Semifinals	8
Quarterfinals	3
Round of 16	1
Round of 32	0

No points are awarded for first round loss in Main Draw.
No points are awarded for Qualifying.

The point structure for Doubles is available in the ITF Rule Book.

PRIZE MONEY and ATP Points
\$50,000 MEN'S CHALLENGER

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Singles	Number of Players To pay	Prize \$ Per Round	Prize \$ Per Player	30% Deducted Per Foreign Player		Amount After Deduction Per Player
\$37,500						
Winner	1	7,200	7,200	2,160		5,040
Runner-Up	1	4,240	4,240	1,272		2,968
Semifinalists	2	5,020	2,510	753		1,757
Quarterfinalists	4	5,840	1,460	438		1,022
Round of 16	8	6,880	860	258		602
Round of 32	16	8,320	520	156		364
Doubles	Number of Teams	Prize \$ Per Round	Prize \$ Per Team	Prize \$ Per Player	30% Deducted (Foreign)	Amount After Deduction Per Player
\$12,500						
Winner	1	3,100	3,100	1,550	465	1,085
Runner-Up	1	1,800	1,800	900	270	630
Semifinalists	2	2,160	1,080	540	162	378
Quarterfinalists	4	2,560	640	320	96	224
Round of 16	8	2,880	360	180	54	126

ATP COMPUTER POINTS (Singles)

The following ATP Computer Points are assigned to the loser of the round indicated:

	<u>ATP Computer Points</u>	<u>Points with Hospitality (+H)</u>
Winner	80	90
Runner-Up	48	55
Semifinals	29	33
Quarterfinals	15	17
Round of 16	7	8
Round of 32	0	0
Qualifiers	3	5

No points are awarded for first round loss.

The point structure for Doubles is available in the ATP Rule Book.

PRIZE MONEY and ATP Points
\$75,000 MEN'S CHALLENGER

222

Singles	Number of Players To pay	Prize \$ Per Round	Prize \$ Per Player	30% Deducted Per Foreign Player		Amount After Deduction Per Player
\$56,250						
Winner	1	10,800	10,800	3,240		7560
Runner-Up	1	6,380	6,380	1,914		4,466
Semifinalists	2	7,530	3,765	1,129.50		2,635.50
Quarterfinalists	4	8,760	2,190	657		1,533
Round of 16	8	10,320	1,290	387		903
Round of 32	16	12,480	780	234		546
Doubles	Number of Teams	Prize \$ Per Round	Prize \$ Per Team	Prize \$ Per Player	30% Deducted (Foreign)	Amount After Deduction Per Player
\$18,750						
Winner	1	4,650	4,650	2,325	697.50	1,627.50
Runner-Up	1	2,700	2,700	1,350	405	945
Semifinalists	2	3,240	1,620	810	243	567
Quarterfinalists	4	3,840	960	480	144	336
Round of 16	8	4,320	540	270	81	189

ATP COMPUTER POINTS (Singles)

The following ATP Computer Points are assigned to the loser of the round indicated:

ATP Computer Points

Winner	90
Runner-Up	55
Semifinals	33
Quarterfinals	17
Round of 16	8
Round of 32	0
Qualifiers	5

No points are awarded for first round loss.

The point structure for Doubles is available in the ATP Rule Book.

PRIZE MONEY and ATP Points
\$100,000 MEN'S CHALLENGER

223

Singles	Number of Players To pay	Prize \$ Per Round	Prize \$ Per Player	30% Deducted Per Foreign Player		Amount After Deduction Per Player
\$75,000						
Winner	1	14,400	14,400	4,320		10,080
Runner-Up	1	8,480	8,480	2,544		5,936
Semifinalists	2	10,040	5,020	1,506		3,514
Quarterfinalists	4	11,680	2,920	876		2,044
Round of 16	8	13,760	1,720	516		1,204
Round of 32	16	16,640	1,040	312		728
Doubles	Number of Teams	Prize \$ Per Round	Prize \$ Per Team	Prize \$ Per Player	30% Deducted (Foreign)	Amount After Deduction Per Player
\$25,000						
Winner	1	6,200	6,200	3,100	930	2,170
Runner-Up	1	3,600	3,600	1,800	540	1,260
Semifinalists	2	4,320	2,160	1,080	324	756
Quarterfinalists	4	5,120	1,280	640	192	448
Round of 16	8	5,760	720	360	108	252

ATP COMPUTER POINTS (Singles)

The following ATP Computer Points are assigned to the loser of the round indicated:

	<u>ATP Computer Points</u>
Winner	100
Runner-Up	60
Semifinals	35
Quarterfinals	18
Round of 16	8
Round of 32	0
Qualifiers	5

No points are awarded for first round loss.

The point structure for Doubles is available in the ATP Rule Book.

Appendix C:
Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your tennis background and how you got started in tennis.

Who and what contributed to your development and success as a tennis player?

Probes: Financially, emotionally, and logistically? Coaches, parents, friends?

2. Tell me about your tennis career up to this point.

What types of tournaments have you played?

Probes: ITF events, Sectional and National Tournaments, collegiate tennis?

3. Tell me about your decision to pursue tennis at the professional level.

What motivated you to continue with your tennis development and compete on the ITF

Pro Futures Tour?

4. Tell me about your transition to professional tennis.

What are the main differences between competing in junior or college tennis vs. on the Futures Tour?

Probes: Social support, identity, self-confidence?

5. Tell me about your current tennis tournament schedule.

What factors influence how you put together your tournament schedule for the year?

How do you spend your time when you are not playing tournaments?

Probes: Training; working out; other jobs and commitments?

6. Tell me about your training and preparation for tournaments.

Probes: Coaches; SPCs; fitness/conditioning trainers; facilities; training partners?

7. What are some of the challenges that you face competing on the Tour?

What is the hardest part about competing on the Futures Tour?

Probes: Traveling for weeks at a time, lifestyle, social support?

8. What is the best and worst part about competing on the Tour?

9. How do you feel about how the Tour is structured and managed?

What are some of the challenges that the Tour faces and how could the ITF Pro Futures Tour be improved?

Probes: Ethical challenges—gamesmanship, cheating, performance enhancement?

10. What factors do you feel have been most important in contributing to your results on the Futures Tour?

Probes: Financial support, social support, confidence, resiliency, determination?

11. How important are the mental aspects of tennis on the Futures Tour?

What are the mental skills that you use most as a player?

How do you work on the mental aspects of your game?

12. How do those close to you (family, close friends, coaches) feel about your competing on the Tour and pursuing tennis at the professional level?

13. How long do you see yourself competing on the Tour?

Where do you see your tennis career a year from now?

14. What advice would you give to players thinking about competing on the Futures Tour?

15. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your experience of competing on the Futures Tour?

Appendix D:
Informed Consent Statement

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

An Experiential Ethnography Examining the Culture and Life on the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Pro Futures Tour

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in a research study of male tennis players competing on the ITF Pro Futures Tour. The objective of this study is to gain valuable insights into the experiences of players competing regularly on this Futures Tour. The researcher, as a doctoral student in sport psychology and as a player on the tour himself, is interested in gaining a greater understanding of both the psychological aspects of what it takes to compete on the tour as well as the culture that exists on the tour and what life is like for players at this level.

PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

As part of this study, you will be interviewed by the researcher and asked questions about your experience on the ITF Futures Tour. The interviews will last approximately 30-60 minutes, and you may be asked to participate in follow-up interviews. All interviews will be conducted in a non-threatening and comfortable environment suggested by the participants. All interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed verbatim by the researcher, and a copy will be provided to each participant for clarification and accuracy.

The information you provide will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym to be used in place of your real name. At no time will your identity be revealed in published reports without your giving permission in writing. Only the researcher and members of his research team, who will sign a confidentiality agreement, will have access to the transcribed interviews.

RISKS

The risks of the study are minimal. While working in the field, the researcher will take every action to protect the anonymity of research participants although anonymity cannot be guaranteed. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study. Although the researcher is a visible member of the culture being studied, no information would ever be shared without proper consent in writing from the participants.

BENEFITS

It is hoped that participation in this study will allow you to add your perspective to the limited body of research concerning the experiences of those competing and traveling on the ITF Futures tennis tour and bring deeper meaning and understanding of your own experience as professional tennis players. It is also hoped that the study will allow you to learn from the experiences and narratives of others as you are provided with the results and findings of the study after its completion in April 2012.

(Participant's Initials)

Appendix E:
Sample Field Notes

very multi cultural aspect of the town

↑ you could find someone who is - long you find anyone to appear this?

Monday 20 June 2011

I'm just sitting watching the news [Carlos's] funeral against [Frederick] (I think that is his name except that he was speaking French and that is not a very French sounding name - so I will check on that.

mainly talks today

[Carlos] pulled out the 3rd best last night and then he started making a little bit when he got back to the hotel. He went to [Paul's] for dinner and then he went to [William's] house and then he went to get a few things. Carlos's choice

enjoyed

he only came up for about 10 minutes this morning because [Carlos] wasn't very good out of the starting blocks.

networking
structuring
your
supp

Last night after [Jackson] and [Carlos's] [Jackson] asked me if I would like to live today when I am happy to do because he is definitely someone whom I would like to talk to more.

I have to
point the
finger at
this
one

Self-reflexive moment - so important

6/19/11

Longsight, FL

• I find myself cheering for the other

• Important self-reflexive moment

The
contrast
is
huge

• We are the only ones left here

• Presencer / player / chaffer, etc. (me)

1. inspire

1. 31 years old trying to make it

1. 21 years old - just done with college

to see if he can make it

contrast
between
co-participants

physical
differences

They look like it's over - one

just seems to have a little bit younger

also, a little more graceful in step,

a little more (to be) - self-confidence
beliefs

jealousy?

longing?

conflict?

On this night it looks like

is going to keep experience and part of

that it's mine out there

plans and not just watching, all these

things, each of the details of the moment is

news part of

fast

you're going to be

you're preying

Disappointment
at this -

Appendix F:
Reflexive Journal Entry

Palm Coast, Jan 2012 ①

Jacob Jensen Reflexive Journal
and it takes a lot of energy to hit with
gus at [David] Daniel. I had a few
minutes break and then I hit with [Jackson]
[David] hit for about an hour. I really
didn't want to hit with [Jackson] but
I felt like I needed to terrify him.
was going to be sitting down ~~with~~ me to
be interviewed. By the end of hitting
with Jackson I was exhausted and felt
like a bulldozer had run over me.

After hitting I then had to run get
some cash out of the bank. I then drove
to tournament hotel to sign a for the
tournament, and then I had to quickly
get to the post office because I had to
get a priority envelope sent off to
Washington with my graduate
transcripts and a few other documents.
These small town post offices close at 5
we don't have an automatic machine to
make a priority envelope, so I had to
get there before 5 and I made it.

I then went and checked into my hotel
which was a ways away from the tournament
site and the tournament hotel. Palm Coast
is not a big ~~big~~ city but everything is
really spread out. I then went to Day's

Palm Coast January 2012

(2)

Jacob Jensen Reflexive Journal
for dinner and I was really happy when I
went ~~back~~ bus to the hotel and saw that I
was for sure in the draw especially after not
getting into the last tournament in Plaudation.

The next morning I drove over to the tennis
club where I was supposed to meet [David] at 8
to hang out for an hour at 9:00. However
it started raining and I obviously got to hang
out at the tennis club until he finally went on the
court more 2 in the afternoon. I did get to
hang out a few guys which was good. I played a
young junior kid for Southern Cal and I
didn't play very well although he is a very good
player. He drop shotted me a lot and I
just came way too many errors and then
he won't control the points. After the
match I waited for a while and
then I went back to the hotel to rest.

The next day I got up early and went
and interviewed [Thickster] at his hotel. It was
a really great interview and I am glad that
I was able to get the interview. I then drove
over to the tennis club where [David] He had a
really good win against [a young U.S. player]
who is a good player and coming young player
who has trained a lot withUSTA coaches. It
was nice to see [David] have a really good win.

Appendix G:
Coding Process (Sample Coding)

Chapter V: Outline Themes/Subthemes

Uncertainty
Insecurity
Financial 236

Transition from College to Professional Tennis

Loss

Change in Support System and Finances

Loss

Shift from Winning to Losing

Increase in Pressure

Perceived Value of Playing College Tennis

~~Other~~ Additional Findings

Challenges of Competing on the Futures Tour

uncertainty

Difficulty of Succeeding on the Tour

urgency

Financial Issues

Urgency of Time (add in quotes and info here)

Social Support

Marriage and Family Life on Tour

uncertainty

Travel Challenges

Mental/Psychological Skills on Futures Tour

Self-reliance

Importance of Mental Skills

Losses

Dealing with Losses

Self-reliance

Focusing and Managing Oneself

Positive Mind Set

Self-reliance

Confidence and Self-Belief

Self-reliance

Routines (adopt a proven form)

not get

Motivation

not get

Mental Training

not get

Player Identity

not get

Issues Facing the Futures Tour and U.S. Tennis

not get

Self-Reliance

Although players
need to be self-reliant

They give rhyme or rhythm not only you also have to have a

Kevin

Enjoyment

Lifestyle of a Player

masculinity, The Player

James - quote

Loss

Urgency

brexit quote -
David - you want to
get out there as
soon as possible

Structure of Support

Appendix

The quote only for each theme

Chapter V: Outline Themes/Subthemes

"when are you getting a real job?"

understand psychological processes in order to begin to help them

237

Transition from College to Professional Tennis

- Change in Support System and Finances
- Shift from Winning to Losing
- Increase in Pressure
- Perceived Value of Playing College Tennis

Social Support
Time

Challenges of Competing on the Futures Tour

- Difficulty of Succeeding on the Tour
- Financial Issues

Urgency of Time (add in quotes and info here)

urgency

Social Support

- Marriage and Family Life on Tour
- Travel Challenges

Desperation

Mental/Psychological Skills on Futures Tour

- Importance of Mental Skills
- Dealing with Losses

Self theme
clashing expectations
superior mind
urgency

transition

Social

Focusing and Managing Oneself

- Positive Mind Set
- Confidence and Self-Belief

Reliance

Routines

Motivation

Mental Training

Pattern

links to sport psyche

Process of Loss

Loss of social support
losing, losing college status

hopeful
positive

Player Identity

Anxiety

Issues Facing the Futures Tour and U.S. Tennis

feel of insecurity

Mountain Stone

Insecurity

what they are going through psychologically

Appendix H
CONFIDENTIALITY PLEDGE

CONFIDENTIALITY PLEDGE

The researcher ensures every participant that the information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the researcher and his research team unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. Audio recordings will be stored in a locked file cabinet, to which only the researcher will have access.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher, **Jacob C. Jensen**, at 1914 Andy Holt Ave., 322 HPER, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996; (865) 974-3340; jjensen3@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and no compensation is provided to participants. You may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Research Team Member's Pledge of Confidentiality

As a member of this project's research team, I understand that I will be reading transcriptions of confidential interviews. The information in these transcripts has been revealed by research participants who participated in this project on good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentially agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information in these transcriptions with anyone except the primary researcher of this project, his/her doctoral chair, or other members of this research team. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards, and I pledge not to do so.

Research Team Member

Date

Vita

Jacob Cannon Jensen was born in Salt Lake City, Utah. He graduated from California Lutheran University with a double major in English and French. He received an MS in Exercise and Sport Science from the University of Utah, specializing in the psycho-social aspects of sport. After finishing his master's degree, he went to the University of Tennessee to study with Dr. Leslee A. Fisher for his Ph.D. At Tennessee his doctoral studies were in kinesiology and sport studies with an emphasis in sport psychology.