

Fitness profiling and comparisons between ranked and unranked competitive Kenyan junior tennis players

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Abstract

Fitness allows tennis players to optimise their playing technique, ensuring high level of performance and reduces the risk of injury. Combined with psychological, tactical and technical training, physical fitness makes a significant difference to determine winning a tennis match. The purpose of this study was to profile competitive Kenyan junior female and male tennis players and determine differences in their fitness on recognised tennis related physiological parameters. The fitness components measured included aerobic capacity (1.5 mile run), strength (grip strength), power (vertical jump), speed (20-yard dash), muscular endurance (60-second sit-up), agility (spider test), flexibility (sit and reach) and body composition (calipers). A questionnaire was also administered to the players to determine fitness training habits and attitudes to fitness. A physical fitness training programme was suggested to the coaches and players but not enforced by the researchers. A comparison of 3 month interval repeat test results for the different fitness components was made between KLTA junior ranked male (n=14, age 16.23) and female players (n = 12, age=14.23 yrs) and unranked players male (n = 10, age = 17.10 yrs), female (n=13.23yrs).

The results of the present study showed that the boys and girls' fitness levels were sub-standard compared to ITF age based normative standards. This may partly explain the lull in the performance of Kenya's tennis players given the relative importance of physical fitness on high-level competitive tennis play. Questionnaire results showed that most of the players were spending considerable time doing fitness training each week, did not have a fitness program to follow and would like a fitness program written for them.

The study recommends that Kenyan players need to be coached on how to implement fitness in their daily training regime, be provided with individualised fitness programs that make more efficient use of time, minimise the risk of burnout and injury, and provide maximal fitness gains.

Key words: Junior tennis players, physical fitness profile, ITF, KLTA, Kenya