



© tommaso fizeu/Shutterstock

Forever Young?



Afraid Not!

by Greg Moran

Greg is an award winning teaching professional and writer. The Director of Tennis and owner of the prestigious Four Seasons Racquet Club in Wilton, Connecticut, Greg is a regular contributor to Tennis magazine and author of the bestselling Tennis Beyond Big Shots books.





The life of a young teaching pro is the best. I know, because 40 years ago, I was one. Fresh out of college with blond hair, blues eyes and young legs, I began my teaching career and thought I'd died and gone to heaven.

My days were spent in the sun hitting tennis balls to people who treated me as though I'd won Wimbledon. At the end of each week, in addition to a great tan, I brought home a paycheck that made my office-chair-bound, pasty-faced friends green with envy.

Today, at 61, there remain a few strands of the blonde hair, but you have to search to find them hidden in the grey. The eyes remain blue, but the color has faded and they're surrounded by deep wrinkles from a life spent in the sun. I have a new hip, two arthritic knees, and a nasty case of sciatica.

I have not had a steady teaching job for five years. I work as a sub whenever one of the four clubs in my area has the need or a sympathetic tennis director sends a few hours my way. Two afternoons a week, I put my ball hoppers in my 2001 Honda Civic and drive to the public courts where I've managed to cultivate a few regular private lessons. If it rains, I don't get paid.

I regularly apply for staff teaching positions, and my resume usually gets me an interview. Unfortunately, the minute I limp into that interview, the expression on the other end of the handshake always says the same - too old and broken down. I have no health insurance, my yearly income is a tenth of what it used to be, and I have no prospects for the future.

OK, I admit, this is not me. However, there are hundreds of teaching pros whose lives closely resemble the description. And, there are countless young pros today who, if they aren't careful, could face a similar fate.

When I started my career, I was fortunate to have good mentors who constantly impressed upon me the need to think about my future. That, plus a strong work ethic, eagerness to learn, and some luck, allowed me to design and follow a career path that, now in my late 50s, has me well positioned for my golden years.

Teaching tennis is a fabulous way to spend your working life. It's fun, healthy, offers great social interaction, and can be quite lucrative. However, like those professional athletes and entertainers who think the 'party' will never end, young pros often assume they'll be able to crank out long hours for a high hourly wage forever. I'm here to tell you, no, make that *warn* you, that you will not!

You are going to get older, your body is going to wear down, and there is always another good looking, younger pro right behind you, hungry to take your hours. With that in mind, you must think of the future. The following are three tips to get you started.

1. Design your Career Path

Where do you see yourself in one year? Five years? Twenty years? Sit down, close your eyes, and let your mind wander. Successful people make career lists with goals and timetables. An example is below:

Age 21: Graduate from college and find a full time job as a staff professional

Age 30: Become a Head Professional in charge of a teaching staff

Age 40: Become a Director of Tennis and run an entire program

Age 55: Purchase, operate and improve a tennis club

Age 65 (or older): Sell the club for a nice profit

Would you like to be a Head Professional in charge of putting together and managing a staff of teaching pros? Maybe you'd like to be a Director of Tennis responsible for developing and running an entire program.

These would be long term goals. Then, you would design a series of short term goals to get you there. For example, both positions require strong organizational skills. Be honest with yourself, and if you're lacking in this area, a short term goal might be that of a Staff Professional. You could work in that capacity for a few years while you attend seminars, work on your organizational skills, and learn from the pros under whom pros you work.

Maybe your ultimate dream is to own and operate a tennis facility. If so, you need strong business acumen, so while you're moving up the teaching ladder, take some finance and accounting courses. Sit down with your club's owner and pick his brain. Ask if he'll let you watch him put together the club's budget.

Your career years should be an enjoyable, progressive journey. However, if you don't know where you're headed, plan accordingly and make adjustments along the way, or you could very well end up spinning your wheels going nowhere.

2. Develop a Professional Image

Many years ago, Andre Agassi said, "Image is everything," and in business, image *IS* everything. In fact, it's the only thing that matters. Your image as a professional will be what brings the opportunities and allows you to enjoy a long and lucrative career. Never forget that, even though someone else may sign your paycheck, you are the CEO of your own brand and that brand is *you!*

The first step toward cultivating a professional image is to earn certification. PTR certification tells people that you are a qualified professional and that you are serious about your career. Many young pros feel that they don't 'need' to be certified. They are *wrong!*

Fair or not, you will be judged by the way you dress and groom yourself. Styles may come and go, but as far as professional appearance is concerned, cleanliness and conservative dress is always appropriate.

Your image is also reflected in the way you interact with people - in person and on the phone. Though each person has their own unique personality, passion, enthusiasm and a positive attitude are traits that all successful professionals have in common. Keep these things in mind:

- **Always strive to make a good first impression.** Everyone you meet could be a potential client or contact. It could be in the parking lot of the club, the locker room or at your daughter's basketball game, so always keep up your antenna. Try to always be personable, enthusiastic and eager to help. It's not always easy, but remember you are in a 'people' business.
- **Be professional.** Whether in person, on the phone or via email, you must always convey an attitude of professionalism. It doesn't mean that you have to come across stiff as a board. After all, we are in a 'people' industry, so relating to our clients in a friendly, somewhat casual manner is a must. However, always remain professional in your comments and actions. Taking care of business is always your top priority. Be it scheduling lessons, promoting tournaments or calling to see how a student did in a recent match, be sure that you project sincerity, confidence and enthusiasm.

Above all, be sure that you keep your ego in check. As a tennis professional, you are somewhat of a local celebrity. You are a 'presence' at your club, and your students, both juniors and adults, will look up to you.

(continued on Page 18)





Forever Young? Afraid Not!

Many pros, when they begin to enjoy some success, get sloppy. They focus on only two things: how many hours they teach and how much they get paid per hour. They forget, or feel they don't need, to do the little things. They don't return phone calls, show up late for lessons, and generally adopt a prima donna attitude. Never forget your reputation is your livelihood and no one is indispensable - not even you!

3. Keep Growing

Successful people always strive to improve themselves. You should too. PTR and USPTA are there for your continued growth and both offer a wide variety of continuing education opportunities on all aspects of the industry. They also provide great networking opportunities that will help you throughout your career. Take advantage of your organization!

In addition, read self-help books and attend seminars. Expand your knowledge of the game to keep your lessons up to date and interesting. Learn new drills and look for new ways to do things better and/or faster.

Be open to expanding your skill set. Learn to put together tennis programs and hire staff. Develop management and accounting skills that will help you gradually shift to the business side of the industry. Become ultra-efficient and organized.

These things may not come easily to you, and you might feel the urge to simply give your lessons and go home. This is natural. For most of us, the tennis court has always been a 'happy place' where we feel comfortable, confident and in control. To step out of your comfort zone takes courage, but is a necessity for success.

We all love teaching, and hope to be able to do it for the rest of our careers. The good news is that we should be able to. What should shift, as the years go by, is the ratio between our work on-court and our work off court. For example, when I started, roughly 90% of my work week was spent on the court giving lessons. Now, with my other responsibilities, approximately 30% of my work week is spent teaching.

As time moves on, this percentage will continue to shift as I spend more and more of my time on the 'business' aspects of my job. As this transition occurs, the ratio of my income derived from on-court vs. off-court work will shift as well. Now, in my late 50s approximately 70% of my income comes from my work off the court. This offers me good protection if, for whatever reason, I become unable to teach.

Will I ever stop teaching? I certainly hope not, however, if the time comes when I'm no longer able to be on the court, I'll still be able to earn a good living and provide for my family.

One last piece of advice - be sure to consult with a financial expert as soon as you can, so that you can begin financial planning. This includes things like health, disability and life insurance, as well as saving for college (if you have children) and retirement.

You may be in your 20s or 30s now, but your 50s and 60s will be here faster than an Andy Roddick serve. If you begin now, plot your career path and take control of your financial life, you'll be well on your way to enjoying a long life in the greatest industry in the world!

Ask the Doc

Dr. Mark Kovacs



Health, Wellness & Cognitive Performance Benefits of Tennis

I was fortunate to work with a series of tennis experts over the past few years on projects related to the Health Benefits of Tennis. I was honored to Chair the ITF's Health Benefits of Tennis Taskforce and our group recently published research review paper titled, *The Health, Wellness and Cognitive Performance Benefits of Tennis*. In this document, we reviewed all the published data available on the impact of tennis on health, cognition and wellness. Below are some of the findings that should be broadcast by all of us in the tennis industry to highlight the numerous benefits of our sport and why Tennis Is a Sport for a Lifetime.

As global society is facing more physical inactivity, increases in many preventable diseases, limited funding from private and public sources for physical activity, it is important to understand the many health, wellness and cognitive performance benefits of tennis. Tennis can truly change lives and our industry needs to do a better job of sending this message throughout all our local communities.

Sampling of General Benefits of Tennis Participation

- A non-collision sport
- Concussions and other brain injuries are highly unlikely in tennis
- A great way to meet people and spend time with friends
- Suitable for all ages and skill levels
- A game that can be started at any age
- A game that can be played for a lifetime
- Played in nearly every country in the world
- Gives a total body workout
- Has built in rest periods
- Involves cognitive function (strategy, tactics, reaction time, coordination)
- Provides low lactic acid buildup, resulting in low levels of perceived exertion

Research Support For Potential Benefits of Tennis Participation

- Increased Aerobic Capacities
- Lower Resting Heart Rate and Blood Pressure
- Increased Bone Density
- Improved Reaction Times
- Lower Body Fat
- Improved Muscle Tone, Strength and Flexibility
- Increased Reaction Times
- Reduced Stress
- Lower Cardiovascular Risk and Mortality Rates

I want to thank the authors of the paper for the great work and all the many contributions to the sport of tennis - Babette Pluim, Jack Groppel, Miguel Crespo, Paul Roeter, Brian Hainline, Stuart Miller, Machar Reid, Bernard Pestre, Max De Vylder, Nicola A. Dunn, Dave Miley and Tim Jones

Please email me at kovacs@itpa-tennis.org if you would like the full research paper.

Submit your questions to contact@itpa-tennis.org
Please put 'PTR Ask The Doc' in the subject line.
Follow iTPA on facebook and twitter
for daily tennis specific sport science and physical education info.

brought to you by  www.itpa-tennis.org
International Tennis Performance Association
professionalism • education • certification

