

THE ROUGH GUIDE TO BECOMING A TOP-100 RANKED PLAYER

LADIES FIRST

AGES 3 TO 7

From the examples of women who have reached the women's Top-100 you probably need to start playing at an extremely young age; possibly when you are just about starting to walk.

By age 5 you could well be playing tennis between 20 and 45 minutes per day, several days of the week, along with doing all the other things associated with having a healthy, happy childhood.

Around age 6 you may have increased your tennis time to almost an hour a day, and usually have joined a local club, possibly with access to indoor facilities.

At these ages, either your parents or a tennis coach, will be teaching you the basics of the game but will have encouraged you to keep playing other sports.

By age 7 you will probably have taken part in your first tournaments and done pretty well in them too.

Alternatively you may not even have picked up a racquet at these ages. End of 2013 world No. 12 Sloane Stephens didn't start playing tennis until age 9!

AGES 8 TO 10

Between ages 8 and 10, you may have increased your practice time to 2 hours per day, most days of the week, either down at your local club or academy, under the direction of your parents or an experienced coach.

You will still be playing other sports, have little trouble finding time to do your studies, and be living a relatively normal childhood.

By age 10 though, due in large part to your outstanding natural ability, you may be enjoying considerable success whilst competing locally and possibly around the country.

As a result of the coaching, training and competitive opportunities given to you by your parents you may by this age already be one of the most highly ranked

players nationally, and capable of beating players much older, stronger and experienced than yourself.

To become a Top-100 world ranked player you will almost certainly have begun playing tennis by age 10.

AGES 11 TO 12

Around these ages you will have decided to specialise on tennis, be training up to 2 hours a day, most days of the week, and have begun a structured physical training programme under the direction of a qualified, knowledgeable trainer.

You will have continued with your studies, but may be finding it difficult, but not impossible, to fit in time to play other sports seriously.

By age 12, having competed successfully nationally, you may be ranked in the Top-5 or so players in your age group. This could give you the opportunity to compete virtually free of charge, courtesy of your National Governing Body (NGB), in international junior events such as the 12-and-under Junior Orange Bowl, the unofficial junior world championships and their associated events held in Florida each December.

If you do well in these events you will be considered to be one of the best players in the world for your age and have already started upon your *Route to the Pros*.

Or perhaps by these ages, and as a result of your success at 12-and-under international level, you'll be so outstanding and driven, that like Maria Sharapova or the Williams sisters, you'll have been spotted by companies or individuals like IMG, Rick Macci or Patrick Mouratoglou, and given the opportunity to serve your professional tennis apprenticeship, free of charge, under the supervision of your parents or coaching staff at an academy.

Alternatively, at these ages you may be invited to attend one of your NGB's tennis schools.

AGES 13 TO 14

Around these ages you will have increased your training time to between 2 and 5 hours per day, most days of the week, and almost certainly be ranked at the top of your age group. Not all of your training time will necessarily be spent on court playing tennis, as your structured physical training programme will account for around an hour of this time each day.

You will at these ages have started competing not just in junior ITF events, but also in the lower levels of the adult women's professional tour - \$10k to \$15k events.

If you're ranked highly enough nationally, you may get the opportunity to play in 14-and-under international tournaments such as the Junior Orange Bowl, the AEGON (Teen Tennis) Junior International event in Bolton, Great Britain, or Petit As event at Tarbes in southwest France.

Reaching the quarterfinals and beyond in these events will establish you as one of the world's best 14-and-under players.

AGE 15 UPWARDS

From this age onwards you will be training between 2 and 6 hours per day, almost every day of the week, as you continue your professional tennis apprenticeship, usually at an academy or NGB tennis school.

By this time you will have become good enough to win matches on the lower levels of the women's professional tour, and have gained your first WTA world ranking.

You will probably progress quickly up the world rankings, and could by age 16, be fast approaching the world's Top-300.

Alternatively at these ages you may still be competing in junior ITF tournaments and reaching the latter stages of junior Grand Slam events.

At these ages you may have left conventional education, to be home-schooled or be receiving your education via the internet.

Here are some interesting figures about modern day women's professional tennis. Of the Top-100 ranked players at the end of 2013:

- 12 had gained their first WTA ranking by age 14
- 91 had gained their first WTA ranking by age 16
- 43 had reached the Top-100 by age 18
- 77 had reached the Top-100 by age 20
- And 23 reached the Top-100 age 21 and over

The startling thing about the above figures, is that as women have to earn ranking points in at least three different tournaments, or a minimum of 10 ranking points in one tournament, to gain their first ranking, the players in the WTAs 2013 Top-100 were often winning matches at professional level well before the ages listed above.

TOWARDS THE MEN'S TOP-100

AGES 3 TO 7

You will in all likelihood have begun playing tennis as part of a fun, family activity, down at your local club or public courts.

By age 7 you may have entered your first competitions and have received your first tennis instruction from either your parents or a coach. But at these times tennis will be just one of the many activities and sports you enjoy as you grow up.

AGES 8 TO 10

Between these ages you will have continued playing and competing mostly for fun, but, due to your natural tennis ability, probably have won some of the events you've entered, and be considered one of the best junior prospects in your local area.

You will probably be receiving some form of group or individual instruction, and perhaps have appointed an experienced coach to help you further. Alternatively, one or both of your parents might be teaching you the game.

Tennis at this stage though, is still primarily just one of the things you do along with participating in other sports, and you'll still have plenty of time for studying and enjoying a normal childhood.

Possibly though, due to your exceptional natural talent and the opportunity given to you by your parents, you may already have become one of the best players in your for your age nationally, be playing between 8 and 10 hours per week, and have competed successfully in events all over the country.

AGES 11 TO 12

By these ages you'll almost certainly be playing tennis for a couple of hours per day, most days of the week, at either your local club or academy. There, you will be receiving regular coaching from a parent or an experienced coach, and have almost perfected your basic tennis technique.

You may also, due to your natural talent, above average athleticism, will to win and innate match playing ability, be able capable of winning matches against boys much older than yourself. Although you'll still be studying hard at school, tennis will be becoming a bigger and bigger part of your and your family's lives.

Around age 12 you may have decided to make tennis your chosen sport. You will probably have found that you don't have enough time to do all of the training and competing required to excel at tennis, and yet still participate to a high level, in other sports.

If you are ranked amongst the Top-5 in your age group nationally, you may get the opportunity to compete virtually free of charge courtesy of your National Governing Body (NGB), in the Junior Orange Bowl and other international events. If you are successful there, you'll be considered to be amongst the best junior prospects for your age in the world.

AGES 13 TO 14

By these ages you will almost certainly have become ranked nationally amongst the Top-5 of your age group, and perhaps have left home to attend a NGB tennis school or private academy. There you will be developing the framework of the game, which will prepare you for success on the men's professional circuit in the next few years.

At your base you'll be training on court for a minimum of 2 hours per day, along with doing up to one hour's extra physical training most days of the week, and be supported by a team of coaches, physical trainers and sport scientists.

You may also at these ages have to consider your options regarding balancing your tennis training and educational commitments.

Along with performing well domestically, you may, if you are ranked within the Top-5 in your age group, be offered the opportunity to compete almost free of charge courtesy of your NGB, in 14-and-under international tournaments such as the Junior Orange Bowl, the AEGON (Teen Tennis) Junior International and Petit As at Tarbes, southwest France.

If you do well in these types of events you will be considered to be one of the top players in the world for your age and have started along the *Route to the Pros*.

AGES 15 TO 17

Around age 15, you will almost certainly be ranked in the Top-5 players of your age group nationally, and age 16, may have become a top world ranked junior.

By age 17 you will probably have left school, competed successfully in junior ITF and junior Grand Slam events, gained your first ATP world ranking points, usually at Futures level tournaments and be propelling yourself towards the world's Top-300.

Of the players ranked in the ATP Top-100 at the end of 2013:

- 21 had gained their first ATP ranking by age 15
- 59 their first ATP ranking by age 16
- 85 their first ATP ranking by age 17
- 96 had gained their first ATP ranking by age 18
- and all 100 had gained their first ATP ranking by age 20

AGE 18 UPWARDS

From this age onwards you will compete full time on the professional circuit and continue your rapid rise up the rankings towards the world's Top-100.

Of the men ranked in the ATP Top-100 at the end of 2013:

- 16 had entered the Top-100 by age 18
- 41 had entered it by age 20
- 77 had entered it by age 22
- and 23 reached the Top-100 age 23 and over

Well nobody said it was easy to reach the Top-100!

A MATURING TENNIS WORLD

When I began writing and researching ***SO YOU WANT TO WIN WIMBLEDON*** in 2006 it was probably true to say that for a male player to be *On-Track* to win Wimbledon, they'd probably need, just like the *Big Four*, to be ranked inside the Top-100 by age 18.

However, at the end of 2013 there were no teenage men ranked inside the Top-100, and the average age of the men's Top-100 at the end of the year was 27.5 years.

In 2013 there were seven male players who reached the Top-100 for the first time, and the average age at which these players entered it was 22.7 years old.

What has happened during the last seven years is that the age at which the vast majority of male players now break into the Top-100 has risen to ages 20 to 22 years old.

As for the women, at the end of 2013 the average age of the WTAs Top-100 was 24.8 years old.

In 2013 there were 17 women who broke into the Top-100 for the first time and the average age they were when they entered the Top-100 was 19.8 years.

All the signs, for both men and women, indicate that it takes longer today to reach the Top-100 than it did as recently as seven years ago.

Parents, players and coaches should plan accordingly!