



A Survey and Research on Family Background Conditions of Active Professional Tennis Players at Home and Abroad

Haoxiang Ye

College of Physical Education and Health Sciences, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, China

Email: 197286153@qq.com

How to cite this paper: Ye, H.X. (2026) A Survey and Research on Family Background Conditions of Active Professional Tennis Players at Home and Abroad. *Open Access Library Journal*, **13**: e15684.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1115684>

Received: June 23, 2026

Accepted: August 3, 2026

Published: August 6, 2026

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Abstract

Tennis is a high-investment, long-cycle sport with extremely high professionalization thresholds. Family capital serves as the core supporting factor for athletes' initial training, professional transformation and long-term competitive development. Taking 200 ATP and WTA top 100 active overseas professional tennis players as well as 50 top 50 domestic active professional tennis players registered with the Chinese Tennis Association in 2025 as research samples, this paper adopts research methods including case analysis, comparative research and inductive analysis. From three dimensions covering economic capital, cultural capital and sports social capital, it sorts out the family background characteristics of active players at home and abroad, analyzes the influence of family background on players' professional paths, competitive ceilings and professional life cycles, and clarifies the family differences in tennis talent cultivation between China and foreign countries. The research concludes that most world-class professional tennis players come from middle-class or wealthy families and sports families, while players from ordinary working-class families account for a low proportion. Most domestic professional players are raised by middle-class families and sports practitioner families, yet top wealthy families are scarce. Deficiencies in family funds, professional cognition and accompanying resources restrict the advancement of grassroots players. Accordingly, this paper puts forward optimized paths for family-based tennis cultivation adapted to China's national conditions, providing references for the cultivation of domestic professional tennis talents.

Subject Areas

Sports Sciences

Keywords

Professional Tennis, Active Athletes, Family Background, Talent Cultivation, Competitive Sports

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Different from popular team sports such as basketball and football, professional tennis features private training, self-funded competition, foreign coach training and global tour participation. From receiving enlightenment training at the age of 4 to 6, breaking through junior tournaments to entering adult professional tours, an athlete needs 300,000 to 800,000 RMB annually for training, competition, foreign coach service and accommodation. The annual investment for Grand Slam-level players exceeds 2 million RMB. Its strong economic dependence makes families the primary subject of professional tennis cultivation. Existing sports sociology studies mostly focus on athletes' training techniques and match tactics, while systematic comparative research on the family background of active players between China and foreign countries is insufficient. With Zheng Qinwen and Shang Juncheng stepping into the world top tier, the gaps in growth paths between Chinese and foreign players have become prominent, and the talent gap caused by family conditions has become a hot topic in tennis research [1].

1.2. Research Objects and Methods

Research Objects: 200 overseas active players ranking top 100 in ATP men's singles and WTA women's singles as of June 2025, and 50 domestic active players ranking top 50 in men's and women's singles registered with the Chinese Tennis Association, totaling 250 active professional tennis players.

Research Methods: First, literature method, sorting out domestic and foreign literature on family capital in sports and tennis talent cultivation. Second, case analysis method, selecting representative players including Jannik Sinner, Jessica Pegula, Carlos Alcaraz, Zheng Qinwen and Shang Juncheng to analyze family characteristics. Third, comparative analysis method, conducting horizontal comparison by classifying family background dimensions of overseas and domestic players.

1.3. Definition of Core Concepts

This paper divides the family background of tennis players into three types of capital: first, economic capital, referring to family annual income and fixed assets, namely the family's capacity to fund players' training, foreign coach courses and overseas competitions; second, cultural capital, including parents' educational background, sports cognition, educational philosophy and accompanying time investment; third, sports social capital, meaning whether parents are professional

athletes, sports practitioners or tennis industry practitioners who possess resources of tournaments, coaches and venues [2].

2. Survey Results on Family Background of Active Professional Tennis Players at Home and Abroad

2.1. Family Background Classification Characteristics of Overseas Top Active Players

Based on survey samples, overseas top 100 players show obvious hierarchical differentiation and are divided into three categories:

First, capital-rich elite families (accounting for 32%). Families with top-tier commercial assets can fully cover the whole-cycle professional training cost without bringing economic pressure to players. Representative player Jessica Pegula's father is a leading American natural gas tycoon with a family net asset of 8.9 billion US dollars. She is equipped with an exclusive coaching team and private tennis courts from an early age, enjoying high freedom in career choices. Filipino player Alexandra Eala's mother is a senior executive of a telecommunications enterprise with access to sports administrative resources, and she entered the Rafael Nadal Tennis Academy with public funding at the age of 13. Players from such families maintain a stable mental state and high career fault tolerance, and can take breaks during injury downturns without financial pressure [3].

Second, sports heritage families (accounting for 41%). Parents have working experience in professional tennis or other competitive sports, owning professional training cognition and industry connections to independently plan children's growth paths. Representative players include Ben Shelton, whose father is a former ATP professional player and university tennis head coach, receiving systematic professional enlightenment from childhood. Casper Ruud and Taylor Fritz are also typical cases, whose fathers are former professional tennis players familiar with tour rules and tactical training logic, which reduces trial-and-error costs and shortens talent development cycles greatly [3].

Third, ordinary working-class families (accounting for 27%). Families with average income rely on national youth sports subsidies, tennis public welfare systems and special scholarships to complete professional transformation, representing a small number of counter-attack cases in world tennis. Italian star Jannik Sinner's parents work in catering services and cannot afford high-end foreign coach fees. He entered a professional tennis academy relying on Italian national tennis youth training funds and special scholarships, and achieved breakthroughs through self-discipline and talent. Carlos Alcaraz grew up in an ordinary Spanish working-class family and benefits from Spain's low-cost public tennis system. Such players have stronger stress resistance but limited career choices in the early stage [3].

2.2. Family Background Characteristics of Domestic Active Professional Tennis Players

Among the 50 surveyed domestic active professional players, no one comes from

top wealthy families, and domestic players show higher concentration in family types, divided into two categories:

First, middle-class families with sports industry backgrounds (accounting for 56%). Parents work as PE teachers, retired provincial and municipal professional athletes or ball sports practitioners with basic sports training cognition. Shang Juncheng's father is a former professional football player of the Chinese national team, possessing competitive sports training experience to balance athletic training and academic study. Zheng Qinwen's parents are public institution staff who devote all family funds to tennis training, and her mother quits work to accompany her to global tournaments full-time, forming a typical family-supported training mode [1].

Second, urban ordinary middle-class families (accounting for 44%). Parents are non-sports practitioners who fund children's tennis careers with stable urban income via private club training. Most players receive enlightenment training at local clubs and form independent teams for competitions after adulthood. Limited funds only support basic competition participation, making it difficult to hire long-term top foreign coaches. Their world rankings mostly range from 300 to 800, with prominent bottlenecks in advancing to the world top tier. Meanwhile, the survey finds that no active professional tennis players come from rural or low-income families in China, as economic thresholds completely block their career paths [1].

2.3. Core Differences in Family Background between Chinese and Foreign Players

Firstly, economic hierarchy difference: nearly 73% of overseas top players come from middle-class, wealthy or sports heritage families, supported by sound socialized national youth tennis training systems. All domestic players come from urban middle-class families with no access for grassroots groups. Families bear nearly 100% of professional training costs while government subsidies are insufficient. Secondly, resource empowerment difference: overseas sports heritage families have access to global coach and tournament resources, while domestic sports families only obtain domestic institutional sports resources lacking international connections. Thirdly, training model difference: overseas families respect players' independent career choices, while most Chinese families devote full manpower to training, with parents resigning from jobs for full-time company, bringing high opportunity costs to families [4].

3. Influence Mechanism of Family Background on the Development of Professional Tennis Players

3.1. Economic Capital Determines Professional Entry Threshold and Career Ceiling

Professional tennis presents an obvious Matthew effect. High-quality foreign coaches, specialized overseas training on clay and grass courts, Grand Slam qualifying qual-

ifications and professional rehabilitation teams require massive financial support [3]. Players from wealthy families can receive customized physical rehabilitation and adaptive training for different court types worldwide. In contrast, players from ordinary families have to reduce competition times and foreign coach courses, failing to fix technical flaws and break the world top 100 ranking threshold. Compared with the public tennis venues and junior tournament subsidies in Europe and America, China's tennis venues operate with high market-oriented fees and junior tournaments are mostly self-funded, further widening the gap caused by family economic conditions [2].

3.2. Cultural Capital Affects Players' Competitive Mentality and Career Planning

Families with higher educational background and cognitive level pay more attention to players' academic learning and psychological counseling, enabling players to have stronger on-court emotion management ability and longer professional life cycles [4]. Parents from working-class or low-cognition families usually focus merely on competition results, and high-pressure company easily causes players' psychological burnout, increasing the risk of injury and early retirement in adolescence. Relevant research from Harvard Sports Sociology shows that stable emotional company from families improves the comeback rate of Grand Slam players under adversity, which explains why players from sports heritage families have stronger on-court stability [2] [3].

3.3. Sports Social Capital Shortens Talent Development Trial-and-Error Cycle

Families with tennis industry connections can select coaches matching players' playing styles accurately, avoid irregular training institutions and arrange junior ranking tournaments reasonably, cutting down time and capital waste. On the contrary, ordinary families without industry cognition may face wrong initial technical training and incorrect tournament registration. Players have to reconstruct technical systems after the age of 16, missing the golden development period [2].

4. Research Conclusions and Optimization Suggestions

4.1. Research Conclusions

First, there is an obvious family screening effect among world-class active professional tennis players. Players from economically well-off families with sports resources have much higher success rates than those from ordinary working-class families, and professional tennis is not an accessible mass sport. Second, overseas tennis talent development paths are diversified, covering elite families, sports heritage families and working-class players supported by national youth training programs. Third, China has a single tennis talent development channel relying solely on urban middle-class family self-funding, with no development paths for grassroots teenagers. Deficiencies in family funds and international resources restrict

the large-scale cultivation of domestic top players. Fourth, full-time family company and targeted support are common essential conditions for new-generation Chinese and foreign players to enter the world top tier [4].

4.2. Optimization Suggestions for Domestic Tennis Talent Cultivation

First, improve the inclusive youth tennis training system. Set up public welfare tennis enlightenment courses in sports schools and public stadiums to reduce initial training costs for low-income teenagers. Establish municipal and national special tennis scholarships to subsidize training and competition expenses of talented grassroots players, breaking the economic screening barrier brought by family conditions.

Second, build an industry resource sharing platform. Cooperate with provincial and municipal tennis associations to integrate foreign coach and overseas tournament resources, lower the cost of foreign coach courses and overseas competitions via group purchasing, narrow the resource gap caused by family social connections, and help ordinary family players access international training systems [1].

Third, guide rational family training concepts. Carry out psychological science popularization for families with full-time tennis accompanying parents, balance training, academic study and physical and mental development, avoid psychological pressure caused by excessive family expectation, and extend the professional life cycle of domestic athletes [1].

Fourth, build a diversified talent funding model. Implement a tripartite funding mode combining family investment, association subsidies and commercial sponsorship to ease the financial burden of middle-class families and expand the reserve of domestic professional tennis talents [1].

5. Research Limitations

This research only selects top-ranked domestic and foreign active players as samples without including low-ranked marginal professional players, leading to elite sample bias. Besides, it fails to quantify the specific annual family investment in tennis training. Future research can expand sample scope and quantify the correlation between family capital investment and player rankings to carry out in-depth empirical research [2].

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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