

THE IMPACT OF CONFINEMENT ON THE KIDS AND THEIR LEVEL OF PLAY



I think it is important to reassure young athletes, parents and coaches during this period of confinement as we approach, slowly but surely, a return to play.

“ STAYING AT HOME HAS MADE IT SO THAT EVERYONE IS USING “SECRET” TRAINING METHODS ... ”

Most of you are simply trying to offer continuous development to kids in order to prepare their return to play while ensuring that they have not lost any of their skills.

One important thing to know is that we can compare this period to an injury, or even a rehabilitation condition. Several professional players, notably *Rafael Nadal*, have had to go through difficult periods and prolonged absences from competition to recover from an injury. Examples can also be found among young athletes: *Bianca Andreescu* (foot stress fracture) or *Félix Auger-Aliassime* (knee injury) had to be sidelined for a few months during their adolescence. These moments of adversity did not prevent them from obtaining exceptional results upon their return to the court.

That said, experienced coaches who have lived through and managed situations that have kept their players on the sidelines for an extended period unanimously stated that this period of inactivity did not slow down their player's progress in the long term. Generally, they concluded that if this period is well managed, it can often be beneficial. These experienced coaches use a common method and philosophy, centered on the importance of using this time to recover, work on the physical aspect and develop specific aspects of their game.

Staying at home has made it so that everyone is using “secret” training methods and uncertainty - not knowing what others are really doing - might worry you. Use this opportunity to make sure your young athlete stays fresh when the time comes to push harder. Stay focused on their needs and do not fall into the pitfall of social media by believing that they should be able to accomplish everything you see online. Follow the steps of their progress and everything will go well.

You should take the opportunity to focus your attention on the child's specific aspects while experimenting with different activities in order to develop different

competencies (mental, physical, technical and even tactical). You should be stimulating young athletes, either by watching old matches or work on a precise shot or movement which needs to be developed technically for their game. You can also listen to interviews given by other players or coaches from different sports, research what the best players were doing when they were the same age as your athlete and potentially take on new challenges on and off the court. In short, keep the motivation and inspire young players all while respecting and understanding that this situation is also difficult for them. Try not to overload them; the desire must come from them with your slight influence.

It is also a great time to build on important values. Several essential qualities can be developed to become an “everyday champion”. It is an ideal moment to stimulate the creativity, adaptation and autonomy of your young athletes. Many leadership qualities such as sharing, integrity, responsibility, empathy and positivity can be explored. Resilience is another psychological aspect to develop and it can be improved by walking to the top of a mountain, by hiking a challenging trail, by persevering through the resolution of an intellectual problem. In fact, many other activities other than sports can help develop leadership, resilience and other essential values for playing sports.

To conclude, the return to play will be a time to rejoice, but make sure to come back to it gradually. Your athletes will continue to evolve, and they will all reach their personal targets in the long term. On that note, have a good gradual return and do not hesitate to find a wall to go hit some balls.