



WHEN SERENA WILLIAMS reclaimed the title of world's No. 1 female tennis player in 2013, the same year she won a Golden Slam (all four Grand Slam matches plus an Olympic gold medal), her

coach was Patrick Mouratoglou. His accomplishments with Williams and other stars make him, in the view of many, the top coach in tennis.

Author, ESPN sports commentator, two-time Netflix documentary star, consultant to business executives, Mouratoglou is building a legacy that rivals those of the tennis stars he's coached.

He founded his first tennis academy in 1996. Now named Mouratoglou Academy, it hosts 5,000 trainees and 250 students annually. *World Tennis Magazine* proclaimed it "Europe's premier tennis training institution." One graduate is Coco Gauff, currently

PATRICK

ranked number two in the Women's Tennis Association (WTA), who moved to France at the age of 10 to train under Mouratoglou. His training centers have since expanded to China, Dubai, Greece, Italy, Malaysia, Texas, Florida and Georgia, and he plans to open five to 10 new facilities globally each year.

In 2020, Mouratoglou created Ultimate Tennis Showdown (UTS), an international year-round tennis league of world-class Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) players with a reinvented interactive format.

In December, before his training sessions of the day—he was coaching Naomi Osaka, four-time Grand Slam champion and former WTA number one—he shared with Brunswick the qualities he seeks in a champion, an anecdote about his time with Serena, his thoughts on the current state of tennis and his advice for CEOs.

What are the essential qualities of a world-class tennis player?

When I started scouting young players, I just went with my gut feeling. Throughout the years, observing the pros and working with the best professionals, I realized there are three key elements that make the

The legendary coach on how to manage stars, the qualities necessary in a champion and what needs to change in the sport of tennis. By **ANTHONY APPLEWHAITE**, **AGNÈS CATINEAU** and **NEAL WOLIN**.

MOURATOGLOU

PHOTOGRAPH: HANNAH PETERS/GETTY IMAGES



difference between a good player, a great player and a champion.

Two are mental, one is physical. Starting with the mental elements, I think they're most important, the first one is competitiveness.

It's difficult to define, all tennis players have this competitive edge inside them, otherwise they would do something else. But some have something really special to win. They find a way to win, and by finding ways to win so many times, they build this very, very strong belief inside them that they will win. And that they will find a solution. They don't panic in stressful moments as much as others, because they have this gut feeling they're going to find a way, which has been reinforced by so many wins and matches they have turned around.

The second one is the drive. You cannot be a champion without a huge drive.

I always tell this story about Serena, we started working together in 2012, she had been in trouble but then she started to win. She wins Wimbledon, US Open, two gold medals at the Olympics and the WTA Tour Year-End Championship. And at the end of 2012, she tells me, "I can't win Roland-Garros. I won it only once in 2002. Can you help me win Roland-Garros?"

So I made a plan for her and in 2013, she wins Roland-Garros. And literally right after the trophy ceremony, she turns to me and says, "Now we have to win Wimbledon."

Five minutes after she won the title she had been chasing for 10 years, she was already focusing on the next one. It shows the drive and the ability to always have a goal and forget about what they've done. The minute after they play, it's over. What's next? She didn't even celebrate, because she was thinking about the future.

It's a tough journey for a young player to become a champion; there are so many hurdles, disappointments, so many opportunities given up. The ones who have the strongest drive are the ones who are going to go all the way. It's something I test in young players. I put them in different situations to see how they deal with all kinds of emotions and if they're able to move on to what's next. I want to see how much they want it, how much they believe in themselves, because all of this goes together.

If you don't deeply believe that you're going to be great, you're not going to be great. You can be driven only if you believe that you're going to make it to where you want to go.

The third one is athleticism. I think the top three champions, male and female, are the three best

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athletes. It's a sport that requires you to be explosive, to be able to change direction very fast, to recover fast too—they're playing matches all day long.

Those three things are the key factors for me.

Can you offer any advice on how CEOs and leaders might manage stars or big personalities?

The way to manage stars is the way I think we should manage anyone. Managing people is about understanding them. If you don't know what people think, what they feel, you can't interact with them the right way. And if you need a star to be part of your team, you have to invest the necessary time to build a relationship with them, to understand them. Once you're able to do that, create the connection, it's never easy, but you'll know how to manage them.

I think the ability to invest the time, forget about yourself and your own views and values and embrace the ones of the other person, that's a type of superpower. I'm not trying to listen to what they say, I'm trying to hear what this person thinks, which is really different. To be able to do that, it requires time, but also a certain mindset: I'm not judging anything, I'm taking everything they say and I'm trying to feel everything they feel in order to be this person.

I know it sounds a bit crazy, but this is what I do to be fully in sync, to be able to trigger the right things within them to make them even better. When you have someone so talented on your team, you have to make that person excel even more.





“When you have someone so talented on your team, you have to make that person excel even more.” Mouratoglou was the coach of both Naomi Osaka, above, and Serena Williams, left.

How have you adapted to the massive changes in technology in tennis?

Way before we had the technology, when I started to coach, I was making my own data with my paper and pen. When you watch sports and even more when you're involved, there are a lot of emotions because you care. I always questioned whether what I was seeing was the reality. Emotion can modify the way you see things, and we can be wrong. I see my role as taking on the major decisions for the player and I cannot afford to be wrong. So, I started taking notes, creating my own data files and ticking boxes during matches to have data at the end of the match.

Now it's very different because we have tons of data, we can look into each match with incredible depth. When I find something interesting, I can get more and more details about it, the things you don't see. So, of course, I use the analysis with my academy and with my players—not that I give them any data, there are things they shouldn't know. It's my job to check what's important and what isn't.

Using the data to check my players' training

progress and track their opponents is an incredible help. When you work on a specific stroke, you can track the improvement. I've seen coaches say, "Oh, his forehand is better." Maybe it *looks* better but if you look at the data in terms of efficiency, it's not always true. And the data from the previous matches of your player's opponents is very important in making strategies before you play them. Beyond what you see when you're watching, the data shows what worked or what didn't, where you were weak, where you were strong.

The number of quality players and parity on both the WTA and ATP tours is really remarkable.

What do you think is driving this surge in talent?

I agree there are a lot of talents at the moment. We have incredible generations and not-so-great generations. It's life, and it's chance.

Tennis has also become a much bigger business. We have made a lot of progress in terms of physical preparation, physiotherapy, et cetera. Everybody has a base level now. The competition is much bigger and it's worldwide. Players at six years old are already practicing sometimes two, three hours a day in China, in Russia, in France.

Lastly, I think it's because Rafa [Nadal], Roger [Federer], Novak [Djokovic], they're essentially out of the competition. Novak is still there, he isn't completely out yet, but those three players have killed the hopes of so many young guys.

That's why I have so much respect for Novak, because when he arrived, nobody was able to compete with the other two. The top 10s, everyone was saying, "It's impossible to win a Grand Slam with those guys." Rafa and Roger already had 10 or 12 Grand Slams. The first time Novak played Roger in a Grand Slam, before the match he gave an interview and said, "I'm going to beat this guy."

The press said, "Who does he think he is?" But eventually he did, not that time, but he ended up beating him because he believed so much in himself. His whole career shows the power of his mental drive is just incredible.

When you stop believing, it's finished. You accept being OK, when before you wanted to be great. The previous generations, they all accepted being third or fourth. And this new generation, they believe they can be number one.

What would you change about the professional game?

I think there are financial problems to solve. The players feel they should get paid more. With how great the tennis is, I'm always a bit shocked by the money

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they make. I don't think it's enough compared to the size of the business—the Grand Slams, the billions of fans around the world, how much tennis is played everywhere. This business is huge.

The top 10 players make good money but compared to other sports it's not much. And if you take away the sponsorship deals, they're a million miles away from other sports in terms of prize money.

The players that are ranked beyond the top 100 struggle even to make a living. They're losing money most weeks of the year. It's crazy to think a guy who's ranked 150th in the third or fourth biggest sport in the world cannot make a living. I think there's a real problem there. These institutions, the ATP and WTA, are governed by politics. It's the same for all sports, the boards, the players, the tournament directors, the agents, all those clashing interests and they all have a say.

It's going to be shocking what I'm going to say, but we care too much about the players. We have to make sure they make enough money, because they're doing a great job in a global sport, but once they get the money they deserve, the product has to be thought for the fans, not the players. It's a business.

That's why I created UTS. I thought, "I'm going to start from scratch, I'm going to build a product for the fans."

As a CEO familiar with high-stress situations, what advice would you give in this volatile time?

Everyone experiences volatility when you have a business. The way I think is always as a coach: Whatever problem or tough moment you have with your player, yes, it's tough, but there's also an opportunity there. And you have to find it.

I made the biggest change in my players' careers in the moments when it was tough, when they were struggling, because I saw it as an opportunity. They were prepared to do things they never had done before and to see things in a way they haven't seen them before because they needed to find a solution.

And if you're a CEO, you don't want to lose your business, so you're more open, you're more willing to change. The question is, where are the opportunities?

During COVID most businesses had to stop, everybody was in trouble. We had the idea to create UTS at that time because the players were available since they weren't playing. And I thought, "Wow, maybe this is the moment to do it, because this is an opportunity I will never have again."

At the time, a friend of mine, also a CEO, said to me, "It's funny, because a lot of the biggest American companies have been created in periods of crisis." ♦