

# Vamos!!! Os fatores indutores da torcida por um tenista pelos torcedores-consumidores<sup>1</sup>



C'mon!!! The inducing factors of the supporting act of tennis players by fans-consumers

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## RESUMO

Os objetivos deste trabalho foram identificar elementos que induzem o indivíduo a torcer por um tenista profissional, verificar a regularidade da torcida do indivíduo por um tenista profissional e identificar se a torcida por um tenista profissional é dedicada a um único indivíduo ou se ela é múltipla. Entender o comportamento do torcedor perante o tenista pode levar ao entendimento de caminhos mais certos a serem seguidos pelos gestores envolvidos no esporte, o qual tem o torcedor como o consumidor das diversas facetas de seu produto. Para a coleta de dados foram realizadas 15 entrevistas em profundidade, com roteiro semiestruturado. Os entrevistados foram homens, residentes na cidade de Uberlândia-MG, que se autodeclaravam torcedores de algum tenista. Como resultado, constatou-se que os elementos que induzem à torcida são o estilo de jogo, a personalidade, e a carreira do jogador. Há um comportamento prevalecente de manutenção de torcida; contudo, exceções foram notadas. A unicidade de torcida se observa mais recorrentemente, mas nota-se também o comportamento de torcida por múltiplos tenistas, ao mesmo tempo.

**Palavras-chave:** comportamento do consumidor, consumidor esportivo, torcida, tênis, jogo de tênis.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify elements that induce the individual to support a professional tennis player, verify the regularity of support of the individual for a professional tennis player, and identify whether the support for a tennis player is dedicated to a single individual or multiple ones. Understanding the supporter behaviour in relation to the tennis player could lead to the comprehension of the righteous paths to be followed by the managers working in this sport industry, which has the supporter as the consumer of several facets of its product. In order to collect the data, in-depth interviews were carried out with 15 men, residents of the city of Uberlândia-MG, that stated to be a supporter of a specific tennis player (a semi-structured script was used). As a result, it was found that the elements that induce supporting a tennis player take into account the style of play, the personality of the athlete, as well as the career of the player. There is a prevailing behaviour of maintenance of support throughout the time; however, exceptions were noted. Generally, the fans support only one player, but it was also observed the supporting behavior for multiple tennis players at the same time.

**Keywords:** consumer behaviour, sports consumer, supporting behaviour, fandom, tennis.

## INTRODUCTION

Annually, billion of dollars worldwide are moved by the sports industry, which has global reach. It is known that such occurrence relies on the fact of the existence of passion. Sports take hold of the passion, enthusiasm, feelings and expectations of people worldwide, being rooted culturally in several societies (Bruno & Messias, 2016).

According to Mullin, Hardy & Sutton (2004, p. 49), "sports marketing is a tool, or a keyword, to sustain the growth of the sports industry, which grows exponentially". This way, one can say that sports marketing is underpinned in activities designed to satisfy the needs and desires of the sports consumer (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2004).

It is argued that sports



are a way of entertainment pretty searched by people around the world. Regardless the modality to be disputed, it is a specific moment that draws the people's attention, mainly by the level of emotion involved, whether through its practice or by the act of watching a match (Burjaili, 2014, p.14).

According to Siqueira (2014), three groups characterize the main clients in the sports environment, which are: players – are those who make the sport happen, practice in several levels, either in the beginning or as well as going through amateur and professional sports; fans – are the main clients, those who are more in the focus of sports entities; and the corporate market – being disputed in several levels, sports allow that any company, of different sizes, may invest in sponsorship.

Regarding fans, it is important to mention the size of the crowd and the interest in such group in accompanying games with some of the elements generating income for the sports entities (Ribeiro, 2021). It can be noticed that the crowd may become to exist for a certain team or athlete since the market actions are implemented for its creation or amplification.

In face of the importance of sports marketing, it is worth mentioning here some economy data that present the importance of tennis, as a sport, as well as its financial movements generated around the world, since it is the sport focused on this study. According to the news on the website Tênis Brasil (2017), competitions such Masters 1000 and ATP 500 had an audience of 938 million people in 2016. On the other hand, according to a publication in the magazine Revista Tênis (2016), the semifinal between Andy Murray and Milos Raonic occurred during the ATP World Tour Finals of 2016 had the biggest audience of people in the United Kingdom since 2009, reaching 4,5 million viewers. This same competition according to the publication had around 106,5 million viewers around the world. It can also be highlighted a growing accesses performed by the digital transmission by Tennis TV as well as the access to the ATP website during the same period.



Another important data regards the numbers payed to the athletes. According to Knight (2021), the 10 more well-paid tennis players (men and women) in the world have received a total of US\$ 320 million between September 2019 and August 2020, being the majority from endorsements, appearances, licensing and memories, and not by income resulting from the play on the court *per se* – and this is a reflection from the relation established between the athlete and his/her fans. On the other hand, Badenhausen (2016) highlights that the mean income of the fans of the US Open is around US\$ 160.000 and this becomes an attractive for the marketing once this demographic portion has enough money to spend on products associated to the athletes, entities and events, both in the B2C scope as well as in the B2B, such as watches (ex.: Rolex), cars (Porsche), drinks (Amstel), energy (Akron), and business services (Nitto, SAP, IBM etc.), among others.

It can be highlighted, still, the tourism potential associated to the sport. Since it is a sport of global reach (for example, its main product, in the male's modality, the ATP Tour, promotes 64 tournaments in 30 countries throughout the year (ATP Tour, 2021a), certain locations may be promoted when being converted as hosts of such sports events. Such actions may be converted into a more suitable promotional strategy in certain locations, in contrast to the more published option of being host of mega sports events, as discussed by Alberini (2014). It is highlighted that the image of a location may be constructed with the presence of a sports events in its boundaries, which may affect the decision making process in either visiting or not visiting a certain destination, as pointed out by Matiza & Kruger (2021).

However, for the location to receive the attention it aims, in addition to promoting the event, it becomes necessary for the location to gather players followed by the respective fans, in a way that such fans may become interested in the event due to the presence of the referred athletes. Such factor may boost the excitement of a sports event, which converts into a *driver* of the



decision of whether traveling or not to participate in an activity of such nature, as highlighted by Uvinha et al. (2018).

Therefore, in function: (i) of the economy relevance of the tennis sport, due to the financial movement it provides and its resulting business opportunities, both in management of tourism destinations, events, entities, as well as athletes; (ii) the fact that fans are the driving force of any sports activity; and the market strategies applied to this sport need to be executed after the behavior analysis of such sports fan/consumer, the following purposes were outlined for this study: (1) to identify elements which induce the individual to cheer for a professional tennis player; (2) to identify the regularity of the crowd of individuals for a professional tennis player; and (3) to identify if the crowd for a professional tennis player is dedicated to an only individual or if it is multiple.

The fulfillment of the outlined goals for this study are of essential importance for the manager of the tennis industry, since the athlete is one of the central elements of the chain, once the admiration obtained by him/herself in addition to the fans boosts a series of consumer behaviors, such as: (1) to watch a game (in person or at distance), which generates movements in the tournaments and for television audience; (2) to purchase (or improve the attitude regarding) sports equipment used by the athlete, such as sneakers (shoes), T-shirts, tracksuits, wristbands, bands, rackets, bags, etc.; (3) to purchase (or improve the attitude regarding it) to brands which are associated to the player, or to the event in which the player presents him/herself; and (4) to promote actions of relationship with special clients, mainly in *business to business*, through the use of the favorite athlete's presence in a specific sports event, both in and outside the courts.

For such opportunities generated by the figure of the tennis athlete to become more evident and to have higher potential of success, it is interesting that the consumer of the tennis sport has his/her relation with the athlete become tightened, and in a traditionally established way for such tightening, in sports, is through the act of rooting for. Such act causes greater commitment



with the tennis player, affecting the way that such consumer perceives all elements previously quoted that are related to the tennis player in this economy sector. This way, to be able to understand the behavior of the crowd of the consumer regarding a tennis player tends to severely help who intentionally promotes business in this industry, given the centrality of the figure in analysis in such study.

## **THEORETICAL FUNDAMENTALS**

With the purpose of helping the study to answer the presented question, the theoretical reference of such study will approach the following subjects: the sports product, the dimension of the decision making process of the consumer, the sports consumer and tennis, as a business.

### **The sports product**

Deloitte (2011) points out that tennis is found in the first positions among the most practiced and preferred sports in the country. In face of such fact, it becomes important to expatiate on some essential elements of sports products related to tennis. A sport product according to Mullin, Hardy & Sutton (2004, p. 94) "is a complex combination of the tangible and intangible. Such product is different every time it is consumed [...]".

According to Pitts & Stotlar (2002, p. 160), the sports product is divided into two categories: tangible and intangible category. The tangible product is attributed to something "concrete, defined, material", such as sports equipment (clothing, sneakers, ball, among others). On the other hand, the intangible product is linked to imperceptive and undefined things, such as sensations, services and psychological issues. For the authors, an example of an intangible product would be the sports events, where socialization, entertainment and other personal satisfactions occur.

It can be pointed out that



when mentioning tennis, one may immediately think of little balls, rackets, T-shirts, net and courts. These are tangible elements of such sport. However, hardly the living (intangible part, as atmosphere of the place) of tennis is standard: it may be a total frustration for the occasional player and ecstasy for the fan (Burjaili, 2014, p. 27).

Burjaili (2014, p. 30) still highlights that “the sport always has some type of game, which includes rules and techniques. Each sport has its own specific aspects, which may become specially attractive for certain consumers”. However, fans do not consume the game, the event of the dispute separately. The living of such moment includes the location’s atmosphere, where the games are being held, the equipment, the accessories, the music and even the festivities before and after the game. All these events are the sales ingenuity for the marketing integrated to the future. According to Mullin, Hardy & Sutton (2004, p. 94) “such events would be created to sell brands and specific products”. In fact, the marketing professional has little control over the central sports product, the game itself, but the professional can focus on the sub-products coming from such dispute.

There are several ways to explore an athlete as a product. According to Burjaili (2014, p. 30), a way to do this is “to create the best condition for the fans to become really close to the athletes when they are playing, which means, to create boxes, mezzanines, autograph sectors and photos”.

The products also generated by the use of the athlete’s image,

linking the image of such athletes to the sports events, attracts the public’s attention, which will buy tickets, trips, packages to accompany their idols acting. In this sense, equipment and accessories may be an extension of such experience or living of the events, sold to the fans and consumers, such as gloves, bats, rackets, caps, dolls, souvenirs, etc, which are a reference for the memory of a game or match (Burjaili, 2014, p. 30).

Still, considering the sense of exploring an athlete as a product, there are the license products. The license products are, according to Mullin, Hardy & Sutton (2004, p. 112) “those produced by independent companies, under a

sport entity". These are produced by a great variety of companies of sports goods and accessories such as Nike and Adidas (Burjaili, 2014).

Burjaili (2014) also highlights the fact that the sports product may be electronic, which means, through TV and through the internet, thousands of people access the content related to the sport in issue. Fans are able to acquire on the internet products of their favorite player through sponsored links meanwhile they watch a match without losing any bid of the game. As highlighted by Burjaili (2014, p. 32), "internet is a location constantly explored by sponsors, which disclosure their brands, making the association of the athlete with the product, in several creative and interesting ways".

Despite the sports product having its own live, its survival depends on four components, as follows: the way of the game, players, equipment and location (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2004).

For Mullin, Hardy & Sutton (2004, p. 97), "a sports product is considered as the most amazing within the sports dimension". From the point of view of the authors, a sports product is different every time it is consumed, once such product is revealed through games and in each match, it becomes different from the other, whether by place, time, people, etc.

At last, according to Mullin, Hardy & Sutton (2004, p. 98), "the uncertainty and the spontaneity is what makes the product attractive for the sports consumer since it depends on human performance". However, the authors highlight that the matches or the performance of the athletes are not exclusively essential, since it is necessary to also consider the experience as a whole and the location's atmosphere is what makes the living into something unique for those consumers.

### **The sports consumer**

According to Mullin, Hardy & Sutton (2004, p. 48), "there are three basic ways of involvement with the sport: behavioral, cognitive and affective. Consumption decisions may be generated from a combination of the





cognitive and affective dimensions". The affective dimension refers to the feeling, meanwhile the cognitive dimension refers to processing, evaluating and planning actions. According to the authors, the sports consumer generally aims at searching for experiences related to the affective and sentimental dimension. It is deduced the act of rooting involves empowering feelings perceived in the affective dimension, which, on the other hand, tends to generate a higher demand of planning activities related to the purpose of the crowd, therefore, also the cognitive dimension.

The sports consumer is influenced by several elements, "the environmental and individual factors influence how and up to what point people get involved and commit with the sport" (Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2004, p. 51). For the authors, the environmental factors would be linked to meaningful people, rules and cultural values, among others. On the other hand, the individual factors would be linked to self-image, the part of life or family cycles, and the physical characteristics. It is perceived a potential relationship from the act of rooting both with environmental as well as individual factors, since the consumer may either chose: rooting for an object due to the way it wants to be perceived or the, by the fact that the environment in which him/her is inserted presents a specific crowd behavior.

For Santos (2013, p. 2), "sports consumers are essential elements for those who manage sports as a business". It is understandable how the fan connects to a certain entity is necessary, having at sight that this type of fan is a potential client to go to games and to consume the several products linked to his/her favorite club/sports player. Still, for the author, "the behavior of such consumers, in particular, is what leads to the production of new products which are adapted according to the desires of the consumer" (Santos, 2013, p. 2).

At last, to understand that sports fans presents different levels of loyalty to a sport is of essential importance, since, according to Mahony, Madrigal & Howard (1999 as quoted in Santos, 2013, p. 2): "To understand sports spectators has become a critical point for the sports organizations".



## Tennis as a business

According to the website of the Brazilian Olympic Committee (BOC), the country has around 370 annual tournaments and over 2 million tennis players, being 33,675 registered tennis players in the Brazilian Tennis Confederation (BOC, 2016).

According to Deloitte (2011), among the ten most quoted sports, tennis has presented itself on the fourth position as practiced and favorite sport, even if it is still considered an elite sport by many in this research.

In face of the importance of this sport in the country, it is worth highlighting that according to the BOC – Team Brazil (2016, p. 1), “the tennis chain – considering expenses with the practice of tennis, financial movements from tournaments, support and sponsors for athletes, tournaments and entities, in addition to expenses with the media”, have moved per year around 1.8 billion reais in Brazil.

Some data reinforce the economy importance of tennis. According to Knight (2021), Roger Federer was the most well paid tennis player in the world between September 2020 and August 2021, gathering US\$ 90.6 millions in the period, among awards, appearances and memorabilia, being the athletes gains around US\$ 90 millions, coming from sponsorship from companies as Nike, Rolex, Credit Suisse and Mercedes-Benz. The same publication also points out that the most well paid female player in the world, Naomi Osaka, who obtained income of US\$ 60.1 million, being 90% originated from sponsorship of twenty different organizations.

According to Tennis Magazine (2014), the United States Tennis Association (USTA) profited, in 2014, US\$ 105 millions, with the sell of US Open tickets, whose tournament has the duration of two weeks. This massive boost in income was due to the amplification of the tennis court complex in Flushing Meadows, increasing, therefore, the capacity of public and, consequently, the availability of seats to the crowd, resulting in an increase in the box office billing.



In Brazil in 2016, tournaments such as Rio Open – the main tennis competition in South America – bet on product licenses, such as purses, posters, shirts and personalized rackets with the brand of the event, amplifying, therefore, the line of official products which were already being offered to the event's fans (MÁQUINA DO ESPORTE, 2016).

It is highlighted, still, according to Badenhausen (2016), that the sport has become attractive for sponsors due to its global character, with tournaments happening around the world and people from different nationalities getting together to watch the tennis matches. Another important factor considered by sponsors, according to the publication, is related to the audience, which means, “the audience which accompanies tennis matches is an attractive demographic part for the marketing, once fans usually have enough money to spend on products, such as cars, equipment and watches” (Badenhausen, 2016, p. 1).

## **METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES**

This study has exploratory character, with qualitative bias. There was no the option for a methodological strategy which would subjugate the other procedures of the research to this choice, such as study case, a narrative research, an ethnographic research etc. Such choice was made due to the purposes of the research and to the available resources for this study to be executed.

A deep interview was the chosen method used for the data gathering. According to Collis & Hussey (2005, p.160), “the interviews are associated to positivists and phenomenological methodologies. It is a method of data gathering in which questions are performed to the selected participants to find out what they do, think or feel”.

Acting according to Collis & Hussey (2005), we aimed at using the same procedure for all interviews, which means, not only the same questions should



be asked, but also should be done in the same way, guaranteeing, therefore, that the interviewed would understand the questions the same way – equivalence of stimulation.

Also, according to the orientations from the same authors, during the process of interviews, notes were taken and a record player was used, to ease the further analysis of the obtained data.

The interviews started with an introduction, in which there was the presentation of the host, the purpose of the study, the expectation of the duration of the interview was presented and the confidentiality of the name of the interviewed. As follows, the interviewed were asked whether they would like to participate in the research and if the discussed content could be recorded. Then, the questions to the interviewed were asked. At last, interviewed were asked whether they would like to add some information to the interview, subsequently ending it.

For the data gathering, a semi-structured script of interview was used (See Appendix); it is highlighted that a script composed by 24 questions/directions was used, but in this article only the first 12 items are presented once those are the ones linked to the purposes studied in this text (this article is part of a greater study, which involved other purposes not presented here).

Fifteen interviews were performed with locals from the city of Uberlândia-MG. The average age of the interviewed was of 28.7 years, and twelve of them practiced tennis. All interviews were performed during the period from September to November 2017, with average duration of 7 minutes each. Those interviews were performed in several locations of the city, such as schools, universities, shopping centers, clubs, restaurants, gyms and tennis courts. The interviews were recorded and transcribed generating a volume with 61 pages.

The chosen population to be worked in such study was composed by individuals that declared themselves being fans of some tennis player. The sampling happened through a combination of three techniques: snow ball, judgment and convenience. The respondents started to be selected by the



techniques of convenience and judgment (Malhotra, 2012), at the same time, since people that knew each other were contacted and that believe having the appropriate profile to provide the searched information. After the first contacts, then, the snow ball technique was used, since the knowledge of the first interviewed was used to find other respondents with the desired profile (Collis & Hussey, 2005).

Regarding the analysis of data, it was chosen to execute a general analytic procedure. According to the prescription of Collis & Hussey (2005), field notes were transformed into a written registry, which means, the information of the interview was obtained, which was recorded, and then the interviews were typed into a Word file for posterior analysis. Such analysis began with the data codification, identifying the factors which were observed in the reading of the answers from the interviewed, which identified factors that led people to become tennis fans. The mentioned factors were grouped into smaller categories, according to the standards or themes that appeared, in a way that group of factors were identified, pointing out patterns of behavior regarding the inductors of rooting for tennis players.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

Initially, a description of the crowd behavior for tennis players in the sampled research is presented. The first observed characteristic of fans is for what tennis player the respondents root for: Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal were the most cited tennis players in the answers (Table 1). It was possible to verify that among the fourteen quoted tennis players in the research, only three had two or more citations in the answers: Roger Federer (8), Rafael Nadal (4) and Maria Sharapova (2). Interesting to also notice the presence of only three women among the quoted sports player.

Table 1

### **Tennis players for whom the interviewed root for**



Tennis player	Ranking – ATP/WTA single (2017 Final)	Frequency
Roger Federer	2	8
Rafael Nadal	1	4
Maria Sharapova	60	2
Juan Martin del Potro	11	1
Denis Shapovalov	51	1
Andrey Rublev	39	1
Alexander Zverev	4	1
Hyeon Chung	58	1
Grigor Dimitrov	3	1
Stan Wawrinka	9	1
John Isner	17	1
Gael Monfils	46	1
Caroline Wozniacki	3	1
Serena Williams	22	1

Source: ATP Tour (2017), WTA Tour (2017) and the authors (2020)

Another analyzed aspect was the crowd directed to a single player or multiple players. Table 2 highlights that most of the interviewed roots for a single tennis player. However, it is observed the presence of the crowd behavior for multiple tennis, fact that presents in accordance with perspectives of multiple consumer loyalties to brands, by looking through the perspective of the traditional marketing. If the situation were placed in the scope of the tennis industry, the tennis player is a brand, and several brands are, currently offered continually to consumers (fans), who may feel more comfortable by choosing to establish more tighten relations with more than one brand (tennis player) at the same time, differently to previous eras in which the exposition to the referred brands was quite limited, fact that induced the consumer to be connected to only one option.

Table 2

### Tennis players for whom the interviewed root for



Nº of tennis players for whom one roots for	Frequency
1	10
2	4
3 or more	1

Source: the authors (2020)

Regarding the interviewed who root for both tennis players, it is worth mentioning that among these four respondents pointed out (interviewed 6, 7, 8 and 11), the interviewed 7, 8 and 11 root for a male tennis player and one female tennis player. The exception is given by interviewed 6, who states to root for two tennis player of the male gender.

On the other hand, the crowd for two or more players is linked to the fact that the interviewed roots for a group of tennis players, the rookies with potential, as highlighted by the excerpt extracted from the speech of interviewed 9.

To be honest, I don't root from one single tennis player, I root for the new tennis players that are entering the circuit now, who may start beating the tennis players who always win, being the tennis level each day higher and not only being the best guy, but all being the best. (E9)

Regarding the crowd regularity, (Table 3), among the fifteen interviewed, eleven stated to always root for the same player, meanwhile four of them stated had already modified the crowd for a player, fact that is also not surprising for similar reasons to the ones already mentioned on the issues related to multiple loyalty regarding brands. In this point, nonetheless, it is different the fact that the multiplicity of the offer does not imply in the multiplicity of affiliation, but in the varied behavior of the crowd.

Table 3

### Crowd regularity for tennis players

Crowd regularity	Frequency
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Roots always for the same player	11
Has already modified, rooting for another player	4

Source: the authors (2020)

A prevailing behavior is observed in the crowd regularity, despite being a considerable manifestation prone to change (interviewed 1, 6 and 8).

An excerpt that exemplifies the perennality of the crowd is presented as follows.

(...) No! No, no, no! Never! [change of crowd] Nadal all the way! (E3)

Interviewed 3 points out a perennial crowd for Rafael Nadal, using inclusive a preach commonly applied to soccer fans, who usually do not possess the habit of changing the soccer team for which they root for.

Among the reasons pointed out by the interviewed in the answers to the question regarding the crowd modification are the (1) confrontation matches against Brazilians, the (2) exotic alternative, and the (3) deepening of the tennis knowledge.

Regarding confrontation against Brazilian tennis players, this manifestation may be observed from the excerpts withdrawn from the interviews with interviewed 1 and 6.

Only when he faces or plays against Brazilian tennis players! (E1)

Only in a very rare occasion and I see, for example, a Brazilian player, or something like that. (E6)

It is interesting to notice that, despite no Brazilian player is of the crowd's predilection, by part of the interviewed, when he faces a favorite tennis player by part of the interviewed, who is normally a tennis player with a spotlight in the tennis world ranking, in the single's category, the geographic identification comes out and the interviewed chooses the Brazilian player to root for. However, since Brazilian tennis players are not normally disputing with the due property the main single's tournaments, the will to win of the interviewed seems





to be something predominant, leaving the geographic identification in second plan.

It is mentioned the excerpt extracted from the interview with interviewed 8:

No! I like other tennis players too! . . . Benoît Paire! This is a guy I like for the talent he has, but it is like Gael Monfils too, he has a very big potential, but they don't value this, then it ends up having matches that I get angry. (E8)

The root of interviewed 8 for Benoît Paire resembles the crowd for the Brazilian players: since this is a tennis player that does not currently appear disputing titles, he does not seem to be such a pleasant alternative as the first players in the world tennis ranking. However, since he disposes of an above average ability regarding the other tennis players, the interviewed is drawn to the crowd to him in situations when he is able to manage such ability to obtain more expressive results.

Another factor to be mentioned is the deepening of the knowledge about the sport. Interviewed 6 mentioned that stopped rooting for Andy Murray and started rooting for Roger Federer and Juan Martin Del Potro after getting to know deeply the style of game of the tennis players.

No, it was with time, I started seeing their games and changed the way I thought about it. (E6)

It should be mentioned that the factors that led to the change of crowd labeled as facing Brazilian players and the exotic alternative are moment changes, which happen due to specific situations. On the other hand, the deepening of the tennis knowledge provoke more permanent changes in the crowd.

Still, most of the interviewed mentioned rooting for a single tennis player, regarding the sympathy for other tennis player, the majority of the interviewed related nurturing sympathy for one or more tennis players, from the question "is



there another tennis player for whom you do not root for, but you nurture a certain sympathy?". Table 4 shows that only 3 interviewed said that they did not nurture sympathy for any other athlete.

Table 4

#### Regularity of the crowd by tennis player

Sympathy for other tennis players	Frequency (interviewed):
Yes	12
No	3

Source: the authors (2020)

On the other hand, Table 5 shows the frequency of the most quoted tennis players' names by the interviewed in the sympathy issue. It draws attention the fact that tennis player Novak Djokovic, quoted as friendly by the interviewed and one of the leaders in the ranking of the sport at the time of the interview, did not have his name mentioned in any of the answers given by the interviewed regarding the crowd since the Serbian has media notoriety by performing activities that, *a priori*, captivate the crowd, as for doing imitations of other tennis players. Perhaps the more traditional tennis consumer was approached during this interview, such consumer is not attracted to extracurricular activities of sports players (and do not value more gaudy actions), giving value to the more strict manner that they present themselves during the competition.

Table 5

#### Tennis players considered friendly

Tennis player	Frequency
Novak Djokovic	5
Rafael Nadal	4
Roger Federer	4
Dominic Thiem	3
Andy Murray	2



Gael Monfils	2
Stan Wawrinka	2
Denis Shapovalov	1
James Blake	1
Alexander Zverev	1
Benôt Paire	1
Mischa Zverev	1
David Goffin	1
Juan Martín del Potro	1
Rogério Dutra Silva	1
Thomaz Bellucci	1
Sloane Stephens	1
Serena Williams	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33</b>

Source: the authors (2020)

Still regarding Table 5, the tennis players Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer are also quoted as friendly. Just as Djokovic, they are participants of the upper part of the professional world tennis ranking (at the time of the interviews), but they have a more traditional behavior in their relationship with fans and the game. It seems that the interviewed may even find Djokovic's actions friendly, but when choosing a tennis player to root for, they point out an admiration to the more classic form of behavior.

Regarding the reasons which lead an individual to root for a professional tennis player, Table 6 represents the mentioned items by the respondents and the categories to which those items fit in.

Table 6

### Factors that induce respondents to root for tennis players

CATEGORIES (Frequency)	ITEMS (Frequency)
------------------------	-------------------



	Exemplary behavior <b>(7)</b>
	Seriousness <b>(5)</b>
Personality <b>(23)</b>	Sympathy <b>(5)</b>
	Dedication <b>(5)</b>
	Empathy <b>(1)</b>
	Stamina <b>(5)</b>
	Classic style <b>(3)</b>
Style of game <b>(14)</b>	Ability <b>(2)</b>
	Rejuvenation of the game <b>(2)</b>
	Technique <b>(2)</b>
	Titles <b>(2)</b>
Career <b>(7)</b>	Life history <b>(2)</b>
	Record breaker <b>(1)</b>
	Money <b>(1)</b>
	Success <b>(1)</b>
<b>TOTAL (44)</b>	<b>TOTAL (44)</b>

Source: the authors (2020)

The category that was most mentioned regarding the fact that it became an inductor of behavior when rooting by a tennis player was the one labeled was "personality", which portrays the way that the tennis player is seen, as a human being, by the public who accompanies him/her. It is interesting to notice that the items that compose such category converge into a perception that the athlete honors the sport he/she represents, something that seems dear to the tennis appreciators.

Interviewed 5 assigned his crowd to tennis player Roger Federer due to the fact that Federer is an example, inside and outside the courts, in addition of being a very friendly player.

Ah, I think Federer is a very complete player, he is a very friendly guy, inside and outside the courts, I think he is an example! (E5)

It is interesting to mention that Federer is a tennis player who takes precedence of his good image, both as a player, as well as a citizen outside the courts, actions that corroborate for the formation of such perception. It is important to postulate that in the beginning of his career he presented a



different behavior, which indicates that the fan's memory is drawn to more recent facts, once the actions from the past are not so notable.

Interviewed 12 credits the crowd to Rafael Nadal due to the empathy that one feels when watching a game, according to the answer when confronted about the reasons that led the fan to root for the tennis player:

Ah, I don't know! Really empathy. (E12)

Such fact makes the researchers to infer that the fan admires so much the player that one believes to be capable of putting oneself in the tennis' shoes, therefore, feeling extremely represented by the tennis player when the player fulfills the job.

On the other hand, Interviewed 1 is more explicit in the collocation of pointing out the elements which led to root for tennis player Rafael Nadal: they are the commitment and the seriousness that the player shows to have with the profession of tennis player.:

I root for Nadal more due to the commitment that he has in and outside the court, the seriousness that he takes to the game and its career too. (E1)

The recurrence in the admiration of a direct behavior by the tennis player has shown to be recurrent in the analysis of certain exposed excerpts. It can be deduced that the perception that the tennis player strives leads the fan to perceive that one's activity of admirer of a certain subject is something that will be rewarded, which will not be a psychological compromise in vain, which will only leave the fan frustrated with an inappropriate behavior of a supposed idol.

The second category that received more mentions towards the inductors that led the person to root for a tennis player was the style of the game, presented with a frequency of 14 occurrences from the items within cataloged. Such category refers to the appreciation of the fan by the tennis characteristics, mainly said, of the individual by whom one chooses to root for,



specially towards what regards the plasticity of the job performed by the sports player, whether in a more dense for, as a demonstration of stamina, or by a more subtle demonstration, as the exhibition of one's ability, technique and by the more classic, traditional form which the sports player presents his/herself inside the court. The category also encompassed the ability that a tennis player has of reinventing him/herself throughout his/her career, regarding the way that the player carries on technically/tactically inside the court.

Interviewed 10, for instance, states that roots for the tennis player Roger Federer, due to the classic game style, the ability and the capacity of renewal that the tennis player seems to have:

The classic game style, right?! He is very skillful! And he is renewing the style of the game to keep himself in the circuit, right?! And this is very cool, I think! (E10)

It is interesting to notice the technical characteristic observed by the interviewed regarding the inductors of the choice of which tennis player to root for. The style of game by Federer is cultivated by the fans, once it is kept to what is most similar to the state of art in the way he practices the sport in discussion. In addition, the interviewed points out elements that the tennis has aggregated in his way of playing that helps him to keep competitive, even though already having a more advanced age, elements that keep the promise of minimizing to the fullest the time of duration of a match, for instance, to return the serve by being positioned in a more advanced place in the court, which is rather uncommon in contemporary tennis.

On the other hand, Interviewed 3 credits the crowd to tennis player Rafael Nadal due to the stamina that the tennis player shows to have, according to the excerpt of the interviewed speech:

Ah! I like his stamina a lot, right?!, . . . aand is everything, everything about him I admire! (E3)



Nadal's stamina is one of the most emphasized characteristics when the Spanish player is analyzed. He presents himself as a tennis player who has the premise of an intense dedication inside the court, not handling himself as an "effort manager", style that contrasts with the one chose by Nadal, in which the player chooses punctual moments of the game to dedicate himself with all intensity to the dispute of points. This tireless facet of the Spanish seems to drawn fans who possibly feel to be rewarded by the player's effort in return of the fan's dedication in following him.

At last, regarding the style of game, it is worth mentioning that Interviewed 14 attributed the crowd to tennis player Serena Williams due to the technique presented by the athlete:

So... I think that Serena... Had already been the best tennis player, first of the world...And today is among the best and I like the way, the technique she has (...) (E14)

It has become necessary to notice that the group of fans who are connected to the tennis players by the issues regarding style of the game either are more known of the game or are believed to be. Among the issues of style, nothing is more representative than the technique of the game, highlighted here by the interviewed as one of the reasons to root for the most celebrated tennis player in the history of the sport.

The last category of inductors that lead an individual to become a fan of a tennis player, to be presented in this study, is the athlete's career. It can be stated that this group of factors presents itself in people who appreciate and value the victories of sports players as a key element to establish the connection fan-sports player.

The items components of such category are the accomplished titles, the life history of the tennis player, the broken records established by the sports player, the money obtained throughout the career and the professional success reached with the performance inside the courts. Such inductors



certainly draw attention of people who value the professional success, provoking the BIRG effect - *basking-in-reflected-glory* (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman & Sloan, 1976), which is an action that the individual performs to enjoy the former glories, associating to those who are considered by one success entities.

According to the Interviewed 11, the titles accomplished by tennis player Roger Federer is one of the reasons that makes him root for the tennis player, as it is observed in part of the excerpt demonstrated as follows:

Ah, the titles, his career, the person who he is! (E11)

Roger Federer is the second tennis player with more titles in all history of professional tennis. In case of analysis, the interviewed certainly feels more empowered by identifying as a fan of such a winning player as Federer.

On the other hand, Interviewed 3 credits that one of the reasons that made him root for tennis player Rafael Nadal is Nadal's life history, as it can be verified in the excerpt of the speech of the interviewed as follows:

[...] his life history is very nice, of how he got to be where he is, aaand is everything, everything about him I admire! (E3)

Parallel elements to the sports life, but that help the narrative of the tennis history of the individual have been considered relevant in the positioning of the brand of the sports players. Several tennis players shelter themselves on social media to be connected with existing and upcoming fans, using elements that tell their history, inside and outside the courts, to show how the individual has reached the current status. Specifically in case of Nadal, the significant bigger traditional media coverage (when compared to those destined to his peers) and the biographies published enable such perception by part of the fan.

Interviewed 4, on the other hand, credits the several broken records by the Canadian tennis player Denis Shapovalov to be one of the reasons that lead him to dedicate his crowd for him:



It was due to the fact that he is very young and is in the middle of great tennis names and by him breaking several records and serves as inspiration for many people. (E4)

It is interesting to notice that the truth to the individual is constructed by oneself, from the way that is perceived in one's world. The fact that the Canadian tennis player has reached some important milestones meanwhile he was still a newcomer in the professional tennis circuit has touched the unmentioned fan in a way that such fact led him to root for Shapovalov. This way, the attempt to position the tennis player brand by using the possible milestones achieved may be an effective strategy to gain more followers.

Interviewed 14 credit the crowd for tennis player Serena Williams, to the fact that she was the world's number one and also for having accumulated a big amount of money throughout his career, as it can be observed in the excerpt presented as follows:

(...) She trains, takes care of herself a lot and other things that I also find interesting is the fact that although she is not number one anymore, I think that in 2002 she was number one in the world, despite that, she was the one that made more money in the career until today! Like that, which means, I admire her career... Her career was very good too, and still is! (E14)

Since the money has a position of centrality in our society, it is expected that consumers choose to be associated to a preferred sports player due to the amount of accumulated earnings, once the need that people possess of showing success through financial earnings.

At last, Interviewed 5 considered that the crowd for tennis player Roger Federer is also linked to the career's success which the tennis player presents throughout his/her tennis history:



(...) And he has always had success, always gave example. We grew up seeing him play and it was over after Guga left, retired, it was over and I think it affected the crowd of the whole world, not only Brazilians. (E5)

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It was identified that the interviewed take into consideration the personality (exemplary behavior, seriousness, sympathy, dedication and empathy), the style of the game (stamina, classic style, ability, renewal of the game and technique) and the career (titles, life history, records broken, money and success) in the definition of the behavior of the crowd for some tennis player.

It was verified that most respondents of this study credits the crowd for a single tennis player – Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal were the most quoted names by the interviewed – with prevalence of the continuity of the crowd for the same tennis player throughout the time. However, exceptions were verified by the interviewed who root for more than one tennis player and respondents who alternate their crowds for a tennis player, due to the reason of facing Brazilian tennis players, exotic alternatives or the deepening of tennis knowledge.

Another analyzed aspect when aiming at reaching the goals regarding the aspect sympathy, despite the most interviewed root for a single tennis player, many of them refer to be sympathetic with several other tennis players – Novak Djokovic appears as a highlight, although he was not mentioned a single time as a preferential tennis player for the crowd.

It is also important to highlight that the majority of the interviewed relate not rooting for and not having sympathy for female gender tennis players. Another additional highlighted point is the almost absence of Brazilian tennis players among the selected players to root for, appearing only as a mention in the answers.



This way, the management implications of such work rely on the use of their perceptions gathered from the consumers and their posterior application in the presentation of the tennis player to the selected follower community of the sport, both to what is referred to the presentation of the sports player, as well as the way that such communication should be performed. For example, it has become the object of application of a tennis player that does not figure among the first of the tennis ranking and must have the basis of his crowd constructed, such as the Australian Thanasi Kokkinakis, currently number 215 of the ATP Tour world ranking (2021b). Regarding the inductors linked to the category personality, which can be emphasized by his sympathy, according to what was exposed by the Australian podcast *Ordineroli Speaking* (Meadows, 2021), when the tennis player presents himself as a friendly person, due to his appreciation for the relation he possesses with his family members. Such aspect may be explored by those who take care of the tennis player's image by promoting a post in his social media, by distributing press releases previously to a sports event etc.

Regarding the inductors placed in the category style of the game, the expressed stamina in fighting the game, in addition to a serve and an extremely potent *forehand* may be explored factors by their image's managers.

At last, regarding the recommendations for marketing managers, the category "career" may be approached with the creating of a short documentary that showed the history of Kokkinakis's overcoming an enormous amount of lesions and diseases, and still having resilience to come back to practicing high level tennis. In specific situations, marks of his tennis career may be remembered, such as the remembrance of his victory over the then number 1 of the world ranking, the Swiss Roger Federer, in Miami, in 2018, highlighting the singularity of such performance (ATP Tour, 2018).

Regarding academic implications, the present study has contributed by being the only study that demonstrates the reasons for which people choose to root for a tennis player. Such theme was not found during the researches



performed for the elaboration of this study, therefore, the study shows the approach of an unexplored theme in the literature about sport management and consumer behavior.

The main limitation of the study is not having a sexually diverse sample, with the composition being mainly of selected respondents of the male gender, selected by the methods of snowball, judgment and convenience, who live in the city of Uberlândia. A greater variety of the members of the sample should have provided an emergency of distinct points of view and, due to this, new inductors of decision of rooting for a certain tennis player.

As suggestion for further researches, it is suggested to reply the interviewed study only with women. It is also believed to be pertinent to replicate such study with a diverse sample of people who root for a tennis player, but are not directly connected to the sport in question, which means, to disregard the players of the sport (tennis players, coaches, etc.).

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## Appendix

- Presentation of the researcher.
- To explain that the researcher intends to understand the tennis crowd behavior.
- To inform the expectation of the duration of the interview.
- To inform that the interviewed will remain anonymous in any result disclosure that shall be done.



- To confirm whether the interviewed wants to participate in the research.
- To ask for authorization to record the content of the interview, informing that this makes the posterior analysis of the answers work easier.

1. Identification of the interviewed:

a) Gender (to write it down without questioning):

b) Age:

c) City and state where one lives:

d) To question whether the interviewed is a tennis exerciser or not.

FILTER QUESTION; PURPOSE 3

2. Do you root for which tennis players that current play in the professional tennis circuit?

\*Observation 1: whether the interviewed inform that does not root for any tennis player, thank the interviewed and finish the interview.

\*Observation 2: whether the interviewed points out only tennis players of a certain gender, question if one does not root for tennis of a different gender.

\*Observation 3: whether the respondent roots for more than one tennis, ask question number 3 again, obtaining specific answers for each tennis player).

3. Are there other tennis players who you do not root for, but nurtures sympathy for them? Who are them?

4. Is they a tennis player that you do not like? If so, who is he/she?

PURPOSE 1

5. What led you to root for tennis player X?

PURPOSE 2

6. Do you always root for tennis player X?

7. (In case it applies) isn't there any situation in which you stop rooting for tennis player X?



8. Have you ever stop rooting for tennis player X and returned to root for him/her again?

10. Have you ever rooted for another tennis player before rooting for tennis player X? If affirmative, who was the tennis player?

11. (if the answer of question 10 is affirmative), why did you stop rooting for tennis player Y and started rooting for tennis player X?

12. (If the answer of question 2 points out that one roots for tennis players who play against themselves), What took you to root for tennis player X1 or for X2 when bothe are facing each other?

