

TEACHING PROFESSIONALS
COACHING ACCREDITATION



Scott Schultz oversees USTA University (USTA-U), based at the National Campus in Orlando, Fla.

Quality Assurance

The USTA's new coaching accreditation program is designed to raise standards and help attract new people to the profession.

In December, the USTA announced that it was creating a tennis coaching accreditation program for organizations and institutions that certify U.S. tennis professionals. We touched base with Scott Schultz, managing director of USTA-U, to discuss the program.

Why did the USTA develop a coaching accreditation program?

Schultz: The USTA believes quality teaching professionals are critical to growing the sport, and we want to do more to support them. Additionally, we realize in the near future, there will be a shortage of tennis professionals, which is a problem that needs to be addressed immediately.

In speaking with leaders of the PTR, USPTA and other key industry stakeholders, everyone agreed that we need to raise certification standards to attract new people to the profession and to ensure that new certified pros have the resources and competencies they need to be successful. Also, an accreditation program will provide current tennis pros with educational programs for professional development and offer support to help grow their businesses.

What is the difference between accreditation and certification?

Schultz: Both "certification" and "accreditation" involve assessment against standards and both provide recognition of excellence. However,



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accreditation refers to an *organization* voluntarily complying with standards set forth by an independent third party, whereas certification is a process by which an organization grants recognition of competence to an *individual* who has met predetermined qualifications specified by that organization.

As the accrediting body, the USTA will not certify tennis professionals. Certification will continue to be administered by organizations such as the PTR, USPTA and any other organizations that meet the criteria established by the USTA to certify professionals. By separating the organizational roles, we collectively create accountability for adherence to standards.

What will the new certification standards be to become a tennis professional?

Schultz: There will be two ways to become a USTA-accredited certified tennis professional: graduating from a Professional Tennis Management program (PTM) or by becoming an apprentice with an accredited organization. Both paths will require approximately 1,500 hours of work and study under the supervision of a mentor to become certified.

Apprentices should easily be able to complete the program in one year, and they will receive credit toward the 1,500 hours for hours worked at their respective tennis facility. This program is similar to the successful PGA model used to certify golf professionals, which for decades has resulted in a consistent supply of highly trained professionals in the golf industry.

What about current certified professionals? Will they have to go through the new program, or will they be grandfathered in?

Schultz: They will be grandfathered in. However, they will be required to meet the certifying organizations' continuing education requirements, which will now include first aid, CPR and the

USOC SafePlay course—which requires training, an education component and a background check.

What is the timeline?

Schultz: In 2018, we will offer provisional accreditation status to qualified organizations who meet our stated requirements. The USTA will work collaboratively with qualified organizations to develop programs and on quality assurance. We plan to launch the new certification standards in 2019.

Are there things the USTA wants to see that aren't currently being done or offered by current teaching organizations?

Schultz: It isn't so much what the USTA wants but rather what employers of teaching pros and coaches throughout the industry are seeking. Currently, educational requirements before getting certified are minimal. We also want to see a mentorship culture created that will attract people to careers in tennis and support them on their journey. The entire industry needs to work together to make this happen.

How might this impact what certifying organizations are currently doing? Will they need to revamp curriculum and requirements?

Schultz: This will be a major change from what certifying organizations are currently requiring. Presently, the only mandatory educational requirement for American teaching pros is an eight-hour online course. Going from eight hours to 1,500 hours of work and study is significant. That said, feedback has told us that industry stakeholders believe we should work together to significantly raise the existing standards.

Which groups do you expect will go through the accreditation process?

Schultz: USTA accreditation is voluntary and open to any qualifying organization. We have had interest from both the PTR and the USPTA.

Do the organizations receive anything for being accredited? Is there any sort of recognition?

Schultz: Participating organizations will have their programs given the label, "Accredited by the USTA." Accreditation provides many advantages to both participating organizations and their members. It will convey assurance to the public of external evaluation, of a commitment to excellence, and that expectations for knowledge and safety are met. The USTA will provide recruitment and promotional activities for accredited organizations and their members at its events.

The members of these organizations will be the real beneficiaries. They will be certified through a very high-quality program that will give them a competitive advantage over non-certified pros in getting a job. Current members will also benefit from broader educational offerings and programs that will be more accessible.

What else can you tell us about the apprentice program?

Schultz: As an industry, we need to create more of a mentorship culture, where seasoned tennis professionals help to teach and bring along those just starting out. This program will combine successful elements of pre-existing programs with innovative pedagogical practices to create the most well-rounded and prepared tennis professionals, which are always needed.

Tennis needs to replicate what colleges and universities are doing today with online education. Interactive, online education is less expensive and more accessible than traditional face-to-face education. The technology now exists for us to have more engaging courses and better quality content for pros than ever before. This will also allow us to tap the expertise of many more experienced coaches and instructors in business, marketing and retail who can pass along their knowledge and contribute to the profession. ■