



TEACHING PROFESSIONALS

Lessons Learned?

The USPTA president states the case for enforcing the continuing education mandate for teaching pro organizations.

BY GARY TROST

For decades, the U.S. has had two associations that certify coaches and tennis pros domestically: the U.S. Professional Tennis Association, created in 1927; and the Professional Tennis Registry, founded in 1976. Both organizations have thousands of loyal and long-tenured members, many of whom are passionate about delivering our sport to the millions of players.

Both associations provide education to the industry and benefits to their membership. But both also compete for the same group of coaches. In fact, one glaring deficiency with the current “two certifying body system” is that both organizations at times have benefited by lowering standards in the quest for increased membership. The United States has the lowest standards to be a

“certified” professional of any major tennis country.

To remedy this, in 2013, leaders from USPTA, PTR and USTA came together to work toward a solution. The common ground was that a more-educated tennis coach would provide better on-court experiences for players and consumers.

USPTA and PTR agreed to elevate standards in the U.S. by requiring, minimally, 12 hours or six credits of education for all our respective members over a three-year period. Additionally, six hours of “Coach Youth Tennis,” an online course, became required for pre-certification of new applicants.

Crucial to success was that both associations needed to live up to the agreement. This would diminish the possibilities for one organization to “poach” members from the other.

However, at the end of the cycle in 2016, there were two distinctly different approaches toward compliance. USPTA sent numerous letters to its membership over a two-year span informing them that not complying with the full 12 hours or six credits would result in suspension of membership and loss of benefits. Local professionals were strongly encouraged to attend one of the 17 USPTA division conventions held annually, participate in Regional Education Days (RED) held around the country, or use TennisResources to gain their credits. USPTA carefully tracked the educational credit activity of each member, and those who did not comply were subsequently suspended.

By contrast, PTR sent an email to its members stating that upon membership renewal, 12 online credits would be available by simply clicking a link—not at all in the spirit of the agreement. Worse, those PTR members who did not comply were never dropped from the membership roster and remained with full benefits—there was no incentive at all to continue their education.

To be clear, this opinion column is not about PTR membership; it’s about one association demonstrating the willingness—and taking the risk—to enforce agreed-upon standards. Throughout this process, USPTA has remained committed to raising the standards of tennis education by *requiring* education as a part of membership.

Sadly, this state of affairs means it’s the sport of tennis in the U.S. that suffers—along with the millions of Americans expecting quality tennis education.

The USPTA currently is the only USTA-accredited teaching professional organization, and I’m proud to stand with the thousands of professionals who, every day, continue to make the commitment to follow-through on the continuing education mandate. ■



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