

**Exploring What Makes For an Effective Tennis Coach:  
Patrick Mouratoglou's Focus on his Students Sets Him Apart**

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## Abstract

This paper explores the leadership style of French tennis coach, Patrick Mouratoglou. Mouratoglou has coached numerous tennis professionals, including former world number one Serena Williams and current world number four Stefanos Tsitsipas. The paper first analyzes how Mouratoglou establishes a level of trust between himself and his students by practicing a democratic style of leadership. When first starting to work with a student, Mouratoglou makes an effort to hear what they want to gain from the experience and then designs his coaching around those goals. The focus then shifts to Mouratoglou's charismatic coaching style. His way of phrasing tasks and interactive coaching helps bolster his students' motivation. A discussion of the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML) concludes the section on leadership and offers some ideas for why Mouratoglou produces such successful players. The final section looks at a coaching scandal from the 2018 U.S. Open and explores how Mouratoglou successfully navigated a difficult situation to maintain his positive reputation.

*Keywords:* Charismatic Leadership, Multidimensional Model of Leadership

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Effective leadership is essential at the highest levels of tennis coaching. A tennis player must fully trust their coach to be successful. The coach is responsible not only for creating an effective training plan with individualized drills, but also for fostering the athlete's belief in themselves and their training. Tennis is often a game of inches, where even the slightest hesitation is the difference between making or missing a shot. If a coach cannot secure their player's full trust, doubt may creep into the player's mind and hinder their ability when it matters most. This paper will examine how one coach effectively involves his students in the coaching process to build their self-confidence and will delve into how he maintained a positive reputation after a scandal on the world stage.

Patrick Mouratoglou was born in 1970 in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France (*Patrick Mouratoglou, 2022*). He began playing tennis when he was six years old and competed in regional tournaments until he quit the sport at age fifteen to satisfy his parents' wishes of pursuing business (*Patrick Mouratoglou, 2022*). At the age of twenty-six, he abandoned that path and began to focus his energy on tennis coaching (*Patrick Mouratoglou, 2022*). Today, the Mouratoglou Tennis Academy is among the most prestigious training centers in the world, offering intense coaching to elite junior athletes and professionals alike. Mouratoglou himself has spent much of his time as the head coach for many professionals, including former world-number three Grigor Dimitrov and tennis legend Serena Williams. Along with a successful coaching record and internationally renowned academy, Mouratoglou runs a popular tennis coaching Instagram page and Youtube channel where he uploads recordings of his lessons for

free. This paper will analyze Mouratoglou's coaching style, using real footage from lessons, to determine what makes his leadership so effective.

### **Establishing Trust Through Democratic Leadership**

Mouratoglou exhibits a democratic style of leadership throughout the lesson to gain the player's trust and set the groundwork for a successful player-coach relationship. Perhaps the most noticeable element of this kind of leadership is his effort to hear feedback from players and create a two-way conversation around his advice. Hackman and Johnson (2013) discuss the importance of establishing a comfortable environment for followers where they feel they will be heard and respected. Mouratoglou does this by consistently asking about how new suggestions feel for the player (Mouratoglou, 2022b, 00:01:17, 00:01:45). This not only gives the player a chance to voice any concerns they may have about the new material, but it also works to weaken the invisible barrier between player and coach. By asking questions, Mouratoglou demonstrates that he values the player's input as well.

Lessons given by Mouratoglou are dense with positive feedback (Mouratoglou, 2022b, 00:02:20-00:02:35). This does two important things. First, it emphasizes his support of the player. It may be intimidating to work with a coach who has coached the best individuals in the world, but his positive reactions after drills increase the player's confidence in themselves. Secondly, it effectively opens the player's ears for the next set of advice. After hearing that they are doing their job well, player's are more likely to continue with the task (Hackman and Johnson, 2013).

Although effective leadership is often discussed in regard to a corporate business setting, its value can be seen clearly in the tennis lessons Mouratoglou provides. Whitaker & Levy (2012) demonstrate that frequent positive feedback in the workplace from leaders will help

establish an effective feedback loop where followers are comfortable enough to voice their questions and opinions. In turn, this feedback loop will ultimately increase performance through an increase in clarity and motivation. On the tennis courts, Mouratoglou works to achieve this feedback loop using the techniques described above. By exhibiting democratic leadership through asking questions and providing frequent positive feedback, Mouratoglou obtains the player's trust and successfully creates an environment that boosts player determination and performance.

### **Empowering Students with Charismatic Leadership**

Mouratoglou uses charismatic leadership to empower his students and expedite their process. Specifically, he uses the concepts of framing and staging, as described in Hackman and Johnson (2013), to bolster players' confidence. He recognizes that much of success in tennis relies on one's belief in themselves, so he engineers the way he interacts with his players to maximize that belief. Oftentimes, Mouratoglou can be heard minimizing the number of obstacles between the player's current skill and the player's optimal skill (Mouratoglou, 2022a, 00:00:20-00:00:45). In other words, he informs the player that everything is perfect except for one small aspect that will be very easy to change. By framing his advice like this, it primes the player to believe that they can make whatever change he is about to suggest. Additionally, the positive feedback before the advice builds the player's confidence and encourages a positive self-image. Mouratoglou is aware that achieving long-lasting change will take significant practice, but he phrases his suggestions in such a way that gives his players the best chance to realize the novel concepts.

Hackman and Johnson (2013) refer to scripting as the ability to define the followers' roles and direct the leader-follower dynamic in a productive way. Mouratoglou achieves this by

breaking down what he asks of his players into manageable sections. Rather than spending fifteen minutes trying to improve his player's forehand, he will spend five minutes looking at wrist acceleration, five minutes on leading with the hand, and five minutes coordinating the lower body (Mouratoglou, 2022b). These smaller chunks allow the player to feel like they are making progress, which will further increase their confidence. Furthermore, he frequently bargains with his players, defining the importance of their role and then explaining what his suggestion will add to their game (Mouratoglou, 2022b, 00:09:05-00:10:30). This gives the player a sense of responsibility and purpose, something that has been shown to increase follower commitment (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). Whether it is framing his comments in such a way that seem achievable or subtly boosting the player's confidence during a difficult drill, Mouratoglou uses his charismatic leadership to provide efficient and effective coaching.

### **Aligning Actual Coaching with Player Expectations**

Andrew (2009) discusses the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML), wherein individual performance and satisfaction are largely dependent on congruence between three elements. The three elements are required, preferred, and perceived behavior from the coaching figure. Required behavior refers to behavior that is necessary for the situation, preferred behavior focuses on the student's desired form of coaching, and perceived behavior is how the student interprets the coach's behavior (Andrew, 2009). Mouratoglou successfully aligns these three dimensions by delivering a demanding, engaged coaching experience to players that want to compete at the highest level.

Mouratoglou fulfills the required coaching dimension without question. He crafts extremely specific drills to prepare his players for real situations they may face in the match. Additionally, virtually all of his lessons feature a high-level junior or adult to function as the

hitting partner for the student (Mouratoglou, 2022a, Mouratoglou, 2022b). This way Mouratoglou himself can coach right next to the player and get the best view of the individual's technique. This hands-on approach also satisfies the preferred coaching dimension. Players want to get the most out of their lesson, and courtside coaching from a renowned coach certainly does that. Finally, the perceived coaching dimension is more difficult to judge. There are no accounts of students reviewing Mouratoglou's coaching, but the reputation of Mouratoglou and his academy seem to confirm that players feel his coaching is worthwhile. Taken together, Mouratoglou provides a satisfying coaching experience by offering intense, individualized sessions that create real change his students notice.

### **The U.S. Open Scandal: Using Transparency to Preserve Reputation**

In 2018, Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka competed in the finals of the U.S. Open. The stakes were especially high for the match. Osaka was playing to become the first Japanese player to ever win a major singles title, and Williams was competing to tie the all-time grand slam record with twenty-four grand slam singles titles. Osaka quickly won the first set 6-2 and looked poised to win the match. Before an important point in the second set, chair umpire Carlos Ramos spotted Mouratoglou gesturing with his hands towards Williams, presumably attempting to provide illegal coaching. Ramos issued a warning in response (ESPN, 2018, 00:00:28). Shortly after the warning, a video was shown on the monitor of the alleged coaching action. Williams, who did not see the coaching attempt, felt she had been wrongly given a warning and let this frustration build over the course of the match. Her anger would eventually lead to a game penalty and a heated discussion with the tournament supervisor about gender inequality amidst boos from the crowd (ESPN, 2018, 00:07:15). Osaka ended up winning the match, but the controversy completely overshadowed the young champion's victory and brought her to tears.

Many saw Mouratoglou's hand gestures as the action that started the meltdown. He was asked about it immediately following the match. During the interview, he admitted without hesitation that he was coaching. He stated that he thought Serena was in trouble and that as a coach, he sees it as his job to try and help (ESPN, 2018, 00:12:45-00:13:25). He also pointed out during the interview that most coaches are constantly coaching during matches, which seems to be widely agreed upon by the public. Hackman & Johnson (2013) discuss the importance of trustworthiness in leadership. Although Mouratoglou admitted to his wrongdoing, this interview actually increased his credibility and improved his reputation. Many fans saw him as the first coach that was willing to pull back the curtain and stop pretending like coaching does not happen at the professional level. Had Mouratoglou denied the allegations, fans and players may have seen the denial as a display of cowardice and inability to own one's actions. As it happened, however, his response set him apart from other coaches and garnered the respect of many.

### **Coaching Review and Broader Applications**

This paper examined how Patrick Mouratoglou effectively leads his students on the court. He begins by involving them in conversation about what they want to achieve and frequently asks for updates on how they are feeling about any new changes. This establishes a sense of trust between the two individuals and the player recognizes that their input is valued. As the lesson progresses, he makes an effort to build up the student's confidence in themselves by framing obstacles as moveable barriers and constructing drills in such a way that their progress will be noticeable. Successful tennis is dependent on a belief in one's ability, and Mouratoglou prioritizes this in his lessons. Finally, Mouratoglou adapts his coaching style to reflect the player's expectations. When coaching a professional, he lessens the positive feedback and increases the intensity, thus aligning his coaching style with the student's preferred coaching

style. The opposite is true for recreational players. Although this paper uses tennis coaching as the backdrop for discussing leadership, these takeaways can be applied broadly across many different leadership situations. No matter the field, a leader can improve follower determination and performance by engaging them in the management process and demonstrating that the followers play a critical role in the success of the team as a whole.

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