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THE ROLE OF NATIONAL TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS IN JUNIOR-TO-SENIOR ATHLETE TRANSITION: PERCEPTIONS AND BARRIERS

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Abstract

The transition from junior to senior competition is a critical phase in an athlete's career, requiring technical and psychological readiness. In Indonesia, National Championships (Kejurnas) are expected to facilitate this transition. This study examined junior tennis athletes' perceptions of the 2024 National Tennis Championship in Riau as a transitional platform and identified related challenges. A quantitative descriptive survey was conducted involving 25 junior tennis athletes in the KU 16 and KU 18 categories. Data were collected using validated closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires and analyzed through descriptive statistics and thematic narrative analysis. The findings showed that 68% of athletes had a very positive perception of the championship, while 68% felt very ready to transition to senior competition. Furthermore, 72% considered the event very helpful in supporting their development. Despite these positive perceptions, athletes reported several challenges. Performance anxiety and psychological instability were the most frequently identified barriers (n = 9), followed by disparities in opponents' strength and competitive experience (n = 7). These findings indicate that junior athletes generally perceive themselves as prepared for senior-level competition and recognize the championship's developmental value. However, psychological readiness and competitive adaptation remain important concerns. Therefore, targeted mental skills training and structured exposure to high-intensity competition are recommended to strengthen athletes' confidence, resilience, and adaptability, ultimately supporting a more effective transition from junior to senior tennis competition.

Keywords: Junior athlete, tennis, career transition, national championship, mental readiness

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INTRODUCTION

The development of national sports achievement requires a planned, tiered, and continuous pathway that supports athletes from initial participation to elite performance. This principle is reflected in Indonesia's National Sports System framework, particularly the provisions concerning sports achievement development. Within tennis, the National Championship (*Kejurnas*) represents an important competitive opportunity for junior athletes preparing to transition to senior-level competition. This transition involves more than a change in age category; it represents a complex

developmental process requiring improvements in technical proficiency, tactical decision-making, physical capacity, psychological resilience, and competitive maturity (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). The success of this transition depends on the interaction between athletes' internal resources and the demands of their competitive environment. Internal resources include technical skills, physical preparedness, confidence, emotional regulation, and the ability to respond effectively to competitive pressure. External factors include coaching support, training facilities, competition opportunities, and the overall quality of the sporting environment. Stambulova emphasizes that athletic transitions involve demands that athletes must manage using available resources and coping strategies(Stambulova, 2009). Therefore, perceived readiness should be considered alongside the challenges athletes experience when entering more demanding competitive settings.

High-quality and progressively structured competition is essential for facilitating athlete development. Junior players need opportunities to experience increasingly challenging opponents and competitive situations before entering the senior category. Gradual exposure allows athletes to identify weaknesses, refine tactical strategies, and develop the ability to manage difficult match situations. In this context, national championships can provide valuable experiences by bringing together athletes from different regions and exposing participants to varying levels of playing ability. Wijaya highlights the importance of competition in supporting tennis development; however, the specific contribution of the source should be verified against the original publication before final submission (Wijaya, 2022).

Beyond technical and physical preparation, psychological development is an essential component of successful athletic progression. Meaningful competition can help young athletes strengthen self-efficacy, develop resilience, and learn to regulate emotions under pressure. Bailey discuss the broader developmental value of sport participation, although the precise connection to competitive self-efficacy should be supported by the relevant passage in the original source (Bailey, Ford, MacNamara, & Pearce, 2010). For junior tennis players, these psychological resources are particularly important because tennis requires sustained concentration, independent decision-making, and effective emotional management throughout matches.

Despite the potential benefits of national championships, participation alone does not guarantee successful transition to senior competition. Athletes may experience anxiety, difficulties adapting to stronger opponents, and limited exposure to senior-level intensity. These challenges highlight the need to evaluate how junior athletes perceive the developmental value of national competitions and how prepared they feel to advance to the next competitive level. Accordingly, examining athletes' perceptions of the 2024 National Tennis Championship in Riau provides useful insight into the perceived role of the *Kejurnas* as a transitional platform. Understanding athletes' readiness, experiences, and reported barriers can inform improvements in competition design, psychological preparation, and athlete development pathways in Indonesian tennis.

The demanding nature of senior sport necessitates holistic athlete preparation, covering physical, cognitive, and systemic factors. Physiologically and cognitively, significant positive correlations were found between physical activity and sleep quality on physical fitness (r=0.735) and cognitive intelligence (r=0.674), reinforcing their role as fundamental performance determinants (Festiawan et al., 2025) (11). Furthermore, the ultimate performance ceiling is linked to comprehensive physiological readiness, as key parameters like Body Mass Index and Hemoglobin levels significantly interrelate with VO2 max, underscoring the necessity of intensive health screening in elite development (Same, Mahyuddin, Dahlan, & Zainuddin, 2025)(12). From a training and management perspective, the efficacy of development is tied to innovative methods and structured management. The use of the Research and Development (R&D) method has proven effective in producing training products that improve fundamental movement coordination and skill acquisition (Wiguno, Kurniawan, Wahyudi, Puspitasari, & Salamuddin, 2024) (13). This development process is supported by the application of technology, where techniques like Augmented Reality in swimming have demonstrated success in providing immediate visual feedback, significantly improving the acquisition of correct technical and kinetic principles (Rahayu, Rozi, Nasir, Priyono, & Difa, 2024) (14). Ultimately, the success of any sporting environment is dependent on management quality, requiring the identification of clear barriers related to resources and social dynamics (Gazali et al., 2025) (15).

Despite its importance, there is a limited number of studies in Indonesia specifically examining junior athletes' **perceptions** of National Championships as a transition tool. Understanding this perception is vital as it directly reflects the effectiveness of the competition system in preparing athletes for senior competition (Effendi, 2016) (6). This research addresses this gap by focusing on the athletes' direct views of the Kejurnas as a structured *developmental pathway* (Jones, 2022) (9), rather than just an achievement measurement tool.

State-of-the-Art dan Keterbaruan (Novelty)

Previous research in Indonesian sport science often emphasizes the physiological and technical aspects of athletic training. While studies on athlete transitions exist globally (Wylleman & Lavallee, Stambulova), their application often lacks the contextual focus of high-stakes national competitions, particularly in a developing country setting where competition frequency and quality may vary.

The *State-of-the-Art* research, highlighted by (Syafruddin, 2013) (8) and Jones et al. (2017) (9), confirms that successful development requires a systemic, competition-supported approach. However, a significant gap remains: there is minimal empirical evidence from the athletes' perspective concerning the *actual functionality* and the specific *psychological barriers* created by the national competition system in Indonesia's tennis landscape. National championships often prioritize immediate results over *developmental goals*.

This study offers a distinctive contribution to junior tennis development by examining the role of a national-level competition as a transitional platform from junior to senior tennis. Its novelty lies

in three interconnected aspects: research context, analytical contribution, and practical and policy implications. First, regarding its research focus and context, this study investigates junior tennis athletes' perceptions of the 2024 National Tennis Championship (Kejurnas) held in Riau, specifically among athletes in the KU 16 and KU 18 categories. Rather than focusing exclusively on conventional performance indicators, such as match outcomes, rankings, or technical proficiency, this research examines how athletes perceive the championship's contribution to their readiness for senior-level competition. This perspective broadens the understanding of national championships by considering their developmental function beyond determining competitive results. By incorporating athletes' direct experiences, the study provides context-specific evidence about the perceived value of national competition in supporting career progression among Indonesian junior tennis players.

Second, the study contributes analytically by examining the relationship between athletes' perceived readiness and the challenges they encounter during the transition process. The findings reveal that positive perceptions of competition and self-reported readiness may coexist with psychological and competitive difficulties. Performance anxiety, commonly described by athletes as *grogi*, emerged as a prominent challenge, followed by disparities in opponents' strength and competitive experience. This combination of findings highlights a potential gap between athletes' confidence in their readiness and their ability to cope with demanding competitive situations. Consequently, the study emphasizes that technical and physical preparation alone may not adequately address transition-related challenges. Psychological preparation, including confidence development, emotional regulation, concentration, and coping strategies, should also be integrated into systematic athlete development programs.

Third, the research offers practical and policy relevance by translating athletes' reported experiences into considerations for improving national competition systems. Athletes' perceptions can inform discussions about competition formats, opportunities to face stronger opponents, access to appropriate training and competition facilities, and the consistency and quality of officiating. These areas are important because the developmental value of a championship depends not only on participation but also on the quality and intensity of the competitive environment. The findings may therefore provide useful preliminary evidence for the Indonesian Tennis Association (PP PELTI), the Indonesian National Sports Committee (KONI), coaches, and tournament organizers when designing more effective development pathways. Overall, this study positions junior national championships as potential instruments for athlete development rather than merely competitive events. Its principal novelty is the integration of perceived readiness, psychological barriers, and competitive challenges within a specific Indonesian tennis context. Although further research involving larger samples and longitudinal designs is needed, the findings provide a foundation for developing evidence-informed strategies to support a more effective transition from junior to senior tennis.

The findings from this research are expected to provide a crucial foundation for refining the national competition system, establishing the Kejurnas as an authentically supportive *supportive*

training environment (Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010) (10) for successful and sustainable junior-to-senior transition in Indonesian tennis.

Based on the identified gaps, this research aims to systematically explore and analyze the perceptions, readiness, and obstacles encountered by junior athletes concerning the 2024 National Tennis Championship in Riau, specifically evaluating its efficacy as a medium for career transition to the senior level. This objective is realized by answering four core questions: (1) How do junior athletes perceive the championship as a vehicle for transition? (2) What are the specific challenges—encompassing technical, mental, and social aspects—that junior athletes face during this transition process? (3) To what extent does the championship successfully support the athletes' overall readiness to compete at the senior level? (4) Finally, what expectations, evaluations, and concrete suggestions do junior athletes provide regarding the championship's facilities, competition system, and the overall experience gained?

METHODS

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design using a survey method to objectively describe junior tennis athletes' perceptions of the National Tennis Championship (*Kejurnas*) as a platform for transitioning from junior to senior-level competition. This design was selected because it enabled the researchers to identify response patterns, summarize athletes' assessments, and describe the challenges they experienced without manipulating the research variables.

Research Participants and Sampling

The respondents comprised 25 junior tennis athletes in the KU 16 and KU 18 categories who participated in the 2024 National Tennis Championship held in Riau, Indonesia. Participants were selected from the population of junior athletes competing in the championship. The study focused on these age categories because they represent an important developmental stage in preparing athletes for more demanding competitive levels. The sample provided information about athletes' perceived readiness, experiences, and evaluations of the championship.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using a questionnaire containing closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended items assessed athletes' perceptions of competition facilities, technical and psychological readiness, competitive experiences, and supporting factors associated with the transition to senior-level tennis. Responses were summarized using descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies and percentages, to identify the distribution of athletes' perceptions.

The open-ended questions were designed to obtain additional information about athletes' experiences, expectations, perceived obstacles, and suggestions for improving future championships. These

responses were examined thematically to identify recurring issues and relevant insights that complemented the quantitative findings.

Instrument Validation and Data Analysis

Before data collection, the questionnaire underwent content validation by experts in sports science and research methodology to assess the relevance, clarity, and suitability of its items. Quantitative responses were analyzed descriptively, while qualitative responses were organized into themes. The findings from both components were interpreted together to provide a comprehensive description of athletes' perceptions and the challenges associated with transitioning from junior to senior tennis competition.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using **descriptive statistics** for quantitative data and **thematic narrative analysis** for qualitative data. **Quantitative Analysis:** Frequency distribution, percentage, and mean were calculated to determine the general tendency of the athletes' perceptions.

- Percentage (P): P = f/N x 100
- Mean (X): $\overline{X}=\frac{\Sigma X}{N}$

Qualitative Analysis: Responses from the open-ended questions were grouped into relevant themes (e.g., competition facility, mental readiness, transition challenges) to provide a holistic and contextual picture of the athletes' experiences. The assessment criteria used for rating the descriptive scores are typically adapted based on a standard scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results are based on the data analysis from 25 junior athlete respondents.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic data highlights the composition of the sample based on age category (KU) and gender:

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Age Category and Gender (N)=25)

Category	Count (N)	Percentage (%)
Age Category		
KU 16	13	52%
KU 18	12	48%
Gender		
Male	14	56%
Female	11	44%

The majority of respondents were in the KU 16 category (52%) and slightly dominated by male athletes (56%).

PERCEPTION AND EVALUATION OF CHAMPIONSHIP QUALITY

Perception Towards the Championship

The analysis indicated a dominant positive view. **68% (17 athletes)** gave a **"Very Positive"** perception, 28% (7 athletes) "Positive," and 4% (1 athlete) "Fairly Positive."

Evaluation of Implementation Quality

The quality of the championship execution was also highly rated: **52% (13 athletes)** assessed it as **"Good,"** and **40% (10 athletes)** as **"Very Good."** Only 8% (2 athletes) gave a "Fairly Good" rating, suggesting strong appreciation for the event's organization.

READINESS LEVEL AND TRANSITION VALUE

Readiness Level for Transition

The athletes showed high mental readiness for competition and transition. **68% (17 athletes)** felt **"Very Ready"** to compete and transition to the senior level. 28% felt "Ready," and 4% felt "Fairly Ready."

Championship Value as a Transition Tool

The benefit of the championship as a transition platform was strongly recognized. **72% (18 respondents)** rated the championship as **"Very Helpful"** in the transition process. 24% rated it "Helpful," and 4% "Fairly Helpful." This underscores the perceived effectiveness of the Kejurnas in building experience and mental fortitude.

MAIN OBSTACLES EXPERIENCED BY ATHLETES

Despite high readiness, athletes identified significant non-technical barriers in the transition process. The most frequently mentioned obstacles were:

1. Anxiety or unstable mental state (*grogi*) (Mentioned by 9 athletes).
2. Opponents were stronger and more experienced (Mentioned by 7 athletes).
3. Adaptation of gameplay/strategy (Mentioned by 5 athletes).
4. *Note: 4 athletes reported no significant obstacles.*

The dominance of mental and opponent quality gaps highlights the key areas needing specific developmental intervention for junior-to-senior transition.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that junior tennis athletes generally perceive the National Tennis Championship (Kejurnas) as an important platform for transitioning from junior to senior competition. The high percentages of very positive perceptions (68%) and very high self-reported readiness (68%) suggest that most participants recognize the strategic value of national-level competition in supporting their athletic development. This perception reflects the importance of competitive exposure in preparing athletes to face the greater technical, tactical, physical, and psychological demands of senior-level tennis. These findings are consistent with Stambulova et al. (2009), who emphasized that successful athletic career transitions depend on the interaction between athletes' personal resources,

transition demands, and available support systems (Stambulova, 2009). More specifically, in a retrospective study involving 240 elite male junior tennis players, demonstrated the importance of tournament participation, national team nominations, and competition results in understanding junior-to-senior transition pathways (Bozděch & Zháněl, 2024). Their findings reinforce the importance of providing junior athletes with structured opportunities to participate in high-level competitions. Nevertheless, self-reported readiness should be interpreted as an indicator of athletes' perceptions rather than definitive evidence of their actual readiness to compete successfully at the senior level.

The finding that 72% of athletes considered the championship very helpful further supports its perceived developmental value. Participation in national championships provides opportunities to evaluate personal performance, experience competitive pressure, identify technical and tactical weaknesses, and interact with opponents of different abilities. The importance of technical and physical preparation is also supported by Jatra , who investigated the contribution of holistic forehand groundstroke training to agility development among young tennis athletes aged 16–18 years (Jatra et al (2024). Similarly, Jatra examined the effects of groundstroke forehand exercises on speed and agility in junior tennis athletes aged 14–16 years (Jatra et al, 2025). These studies highlight the importance of integrating technical practice with physical development in preparing young tennis players for competitive demands. Furthermore, Jatra et al. (2025) demonstrated the relevance of a holistic training approach that integrates technical, mental, and physical components in the development of junior tennis players' forehand and backhand skills. Consequently, the Kejurnas may function as more than a tournament for determining winners and rankings; it can also provide meaningful competitive learning experiences. However, the effectiveness of this transitional platform depends on the quality of competition, the availability of appropriate facilities, and the extent to which athletes receive adequate support before, during, and after participation.

An important finding is the coexistence of positive readiness assessments and persistent psychological challenges. Performance anxiety or *grogi* was the most frequently reported barrier, identified by nine athletes. This result suggests that athletes who feel generally prepared may still experience difficulties regulating emotions and maintaining concentration under competitive pressure. This finding has a particularly strong connection with Jatra and Raibowo (2021), who investigated the relationship between anxiety and concentration among 50 tennis athletes participating in a tournament (Jatra & Raibowo, 2021). Their findings revealed a strong correlation between anxiety and concentration ($r = 0.784$), indicating that higher anxiety levels were associated with lower concentration. This evidence provides a relevant explanation for why psychological challenges may persist even among athletes who perceive themselves as ready for national-level competition. Furthermore, (Parakes & Jatra, 2025) emphasized the integration of mental components into tennis training through a holistic approach, suggesting that technical development should not be separated from psychological preparation (Jatra, et al, 2024). In tennis, where individual performance depends heavily on decision-making, consistency, and self-regulation, psychological instability may influence

the execution of technical and tactical skills. Therefore, readiness for senior competition should not be assessed solely through technical proficiency or physical conditioning. Mental preparation should be integrated into regular training through routines for managing pressure, concentration exercises, confidence development, emotional regulation, and simulated high-pressure match situations.

Another challenge involved differences in opponents' strength and competitive experience, reported by seven athletes. This finding indicates that transitioning to senior competition may expose junior players to opponents with greater tactical maturity, match experience, and the ability to manage difficult situations. Such differences can create a substantial adjustment challenge, even for technically capable junior athletes. (Bozděch & Zháněl, 2024) highlighted the importance of tournament results and national team participation in understanding the progression of elite junior tennis players toward senior competition. Their findings suggest that competitive development should be evaluated through athletes' actual participation and performance in increasingly demanding competitive environments. In addition, (Kovacs, 2006) explained that tennis performance involves complex physiological demands, including repeated high-intensity movements, recovery, and the ability to maintain physical performance throughout a match. These demands may become increasingly challenging when junior athletes encounter stronger and more experienced opponents. To address this issue, competition organizers and tennis federations could provide more frequent opportunities to participate in high-quality tournaments and develop structured competition pathways that progressively expose junior players to stronger opponents. Graduated competitive exposure may help athletes adapt to greater match intensity while allowing coaches to identify areas requiring further development.

Athletes' recommendations for increasing competition frequency, improving facilities, and enhancing officiating quality also have practical implications. These suggestions indicate that athletes view successful development as dependent not only on individual preparation but also on the broader competitive environment. This perspective is consistent with (Henriksen et al., 2010), who emphasized the importance of supportive talent development environments, organizational culture, and cooperation among athletes, coaches, and other stakeholders. In the context of tennis competition, officiating quality is also relevant because match officials contribute to the consistency and credibility of competition. (Jatra & Rezki, 2022), in their study of tennis referees during the ASEAN School Games, identified anxiety as an important issue in match officiating, highlighting the need for psychological control among officials. Although their study focused on referees rather than athletes, it provides a complementary perspective on the importance of human resources and professional competence in maintaining a supportive competitive environment. Furthermore,(Parakes & Jatra, 2025) found that the motivation of university tennis athletes was associated with the availability of coaching support, facilities, and competitive activities. These findings reinforce the argument that athlete development requires institutional and organizational support beyond individual training. Therefore, PP PELTI, KONI, coaches, and tournament organizers should consider athlete feedback

when planning future championships. Improvements in event organization, facility availability, competition scheduling, coaching support, and officiating consistency may strengthen athletes' experiences and increase the developmental value of national tournaments.

Overall, the findings suggest that the Kejurnas is perceived as a valuable transitional platform, although psychological readiness and adaptation to stronger opponents remain important challenges. The findings also highlight the distinction between perceived readiness and actual competitive preparedness, indicating that participation in national championships should be integrated into a broader and more systematic athlete development pathway. Combining improved competition opportunities, systematic mental skills training, structured exposure to higher-level opponents, and better event organization may support a more effective transition from junior to senior tennis. These conclusions should be interpreted within the study's descriptive design and sample of 25 athletes. The findings reflect athletes' perceptions and experiences rather than objectively measured changes in competitive performance or successful senior-level transition outcomes. Further research involving larger samples, longitudinal performance assessments, and objective indicators of competitive development is needed to establish whether positive perceptions of national-level competition translate into successful senior-level outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the majority of junior tennis athletes demonstrate positive perceptions of the National Tennis Championship (Kejurnas) and report a high level of readiness to transition from junior to senior competition. The championship is widely regarded as a valuable developmental platform that provides competitive experience, opportunities to evaluate individual performance, and exposure to opponents with varying levels of ability and experience. These experiences may contribute to athletes' confidence, competitive maturity, and understanding of the demands associated with higher levels of tennis competition. Furthermore, the athletes' responses suggest that the event plays an important role in supporting their long-term sporting development.

Despite these encouraging findings, several challenges remain. Psychological barriers, particularly performance anxiety or *grogi*, represent a significant concern that may affect athletes' concentration, confidence, and ability to perform under competitive pressure. In addition, differences in opponents' strength, tactical ability, and competitive experience may create difficulties for junior athletes preparing to enter senior-level competition. These findings suggest that perceived readiness does not necessarily guarantee complete psychological and competitive preparedness. Therefore, athlete development programs should extend beyond technical and physical training to incorporate systematic mental skills preparation, including emotional regulation, concentration, confidence building, and strategies for managing pressure during important matches.

The athletes' evaluations also indicate generally positive experiences with the current implementation of the championship. However, improvements in competition frequency,

infrastructure quality, and opportunities for sustained competitive exposure are needed to maximize its developmental value. More frequent participation in high-quality tournaments could help athletes adapt progressively to stronger opposition and more demanding match situations. Meanwhile, adequate facilities and well-organized competition environments could support safer, more consistent, and more effective athlete development.

In conclusion, the National Tennis Championship has considerable potential to facilitate the transition from junior to senior tennis competition in Indonesia. To strengthen this role, the Indonesian Tennis Association (PP PELTI), the Indonesian National Sports Committee (KONI), coaches, and tournament organizers should collaborate to improve competitive opportunities, psychological preparation, and supporting infrastructure. These measures may help reduce transition-related challenges and establish a more structured pathway for sustainable junior tennis development.

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Recommendations for Use:** The Kejurnas should be explicitly promoted and designed with a stronger focus on its *developmental goal* as a transition platform. The insights gained from this study can guide coaches in prioritizing **mental skills training** alongside technical drills to specifically address performance anxiety during high-stakes, transitional matches.
2. **Recommendations for Dissemination:** Findings should be disseminated to PP PELTI and KONI to inform policy on competition scheduling, emphasizing the need to **increase the number of regional and national quality competitions** to provide consistent exposure for athletes.
3. **Recommendations for Further Development:** Future research should expand the current development to include **interventional studies** to test the effectiveness of specific mental resilience training models in reducing *grogi* among junior athletes and to quantitatively measure the impact of varied competition exposure on transition success rates.

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