



Carrie Cunningham of Livonia has been bothered by an assortment of nagging injuries in her young career.

Officials battle tennis burnout

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Tenerowicz said she doesn't support restrictions because "there'll always be 40 tournaments a year for juniors to enter. A lot of it has to do with parents and whether they rush children into tournaments," she said.

JO ANN ASHARE of Bloomfield Hills does not support the restrictions either. She's the mother of six tennis-playing children, four of whom are involved in the game at the club, high school and college level.

"Young players should be able to compete, and certainly they have the right to compete, even though emotionally it is tough," she said.

"Physically, I don't think playing professionally hurts. They're going to play a lot regardless of whether it's professionally or on the junior circuit, and you have a lot of injuries on the junior circuit too."

"If Austin played college tennis, she might have come down with the back injury anyway," Ashare said.

She said competing in junior tennis might be more difficult than turning pro. "In juniors you're competing against the same peers all the time, always trying to be the best of that age... so it can be a relief to get out of juniors and play pro or college tennis."

Ashare suggested there may be another motive behind the proposed restrictions. "The ladies (on the pro tour) just don't like the kids taking over," she said.

Dyla doubts that. Members of the ITF and Women's Tennis Association (WTA), which also backs some form of restrictions, are genuinely concerned with player burnout, she said.

"And as I understand it, they want to be very careful before doing anything

like this. They don't want to bring sanctions they can't uphold," Dyla said.

TENNIS MOTHER Candy Gilles of Plymouth said, "The pro circuit is really grinding — I know that for a fact because my kids are so close to Lisa Bonder."

Bonder, who turned pro at 15, is going strong at 19, although she was defeated at Wimbledon by Martina Navratilova in first-round play last week.

Gilles' daughters are Chris, who plays tennis at the University of Wisconsin, and Wendy, a highly ranked juniors player. Their mother said:

"I think kids should finish high school at least before turning pro. It can be really tough and lonely on the tour with no friends. I know Lisa has had a tough row to hoe, living and working out of a suitcase."

John Fisher, now with the Franklin Racquet Club, has been called "the driving force behind Lisa Bonder." He began coaching her when she was 5 years old.

Yet Fisher said he supports restrictions on younger players. "I see a couple of problems with turning pro too early," he said.

"FIRST — AND this showed up with Jaeger and Austin — you run into the injury problem because the pros they're up against hit the ball that much harder, and the travel can be rugged."

"Second there's the social problem, being away from friends and social activities."

He added, "You're not talking about limiting that many players. At most you're talking about one or two players

in the world who could turn pro, and you're helping them in the long run."

He doesn't doubt, though, that Bonder was ready to turn pro at 15. "She had proven herself in the juniors and had already played a number of road tournaments. And by the time she turned pro, she ranked high enough on the WTA computer list to get into the main draws in tournaments."

"She also had endorsements — a financial base to build upon — so she didn't have to play every week. She could take time off to let injuries heal."

According to Gilles, turning pro at a young age "is not a question of skills but a question of money, because money brings out skills and opportunities. It's a well-known fact that kids turning pro have an awful lot of money behind them."

Tenerowicz also added, "One reason so many turn pro at an early age is, unless you're from a wealthy family, it's very expensive to compete."

JOCIL ROGUS, pro at the Rochester Hills Racquet Club, agreed. "It's a two-fold problem," she said.

"You do get injuries playing against adults who are more fully developed. On the other hand there's the case of Camille Benjamin, a black girl, who was forced to turn pro because her parents couldn't afford to finance her career."

Rogus said it can cost about \$20,000 a year to keep a young player on the juniors circuit. She called that "an outrageous amount unless you're from an upper-middle-class family or can earn your way."

Rogus said she supports restrictions on 14- and 15-year-olds but added, "Someone should establish a fund to make certain younger players can afford to compete."

While the sanctions have yet to be formally approved by the ITF or WTA, Rogus and Dyla said they assume the sanctions would be challenged in court.

Pierce in Heritage race

U.S. National Team member Jeff Pierce of Livonia will compete Sunday, July 28, at the Heritage Classic Bicycle Race in Wyandotte.

The event, organized by the Downriver Cycling Club, is expected to attract 200 mid-class racers from the United States, Canada, Europe, New Zealand and Australia.

Pierce, who just missed making the U.S. Olympic team last summer, will be joined by local racers Celeste and Lisa Andrew of Dearborn, former U.S. National and state champions.

The ASC Heritage Classic will start at 1 p.m. on Biddle Avenue near Elm Street in Wyandotte. It is a half-mile course.

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