

TIP OF THE MONTH by Peter Farrell – Development Officer.

I recently attended the **European Coaches Symposium** at the LTA's magnificent new tennis facility in Roehampton, London. Most of the presentations and information were directly related to working with high performance players, but one speaker touched on a subject which is of broader interest.



Melanie Maillard of France (*pictured*) is a clinical psychologist who works for the French Tennis Federation and with France's top players and coaches. She spoke about **'Working with Parents'**, and made many interesting points which I summarise below.

In a 2006 study carried out in the USA, it was found that 36% of parents negatively influence their child's development in sport.

How are these problems caused?

- Parents sometimes overemphasise results (winning).
- Parents sometimes criticise children too much with regard to their sport.
- Parents sometimes lack emotional control when watching their child compete.
- The ego of some parents is determined by their child's sporting success.
- Some parents have unrealistic expectations of what their child might achieve in sport.

Melanie emphasised that being a parent is a very difficult job these days, when you take into account all the current societal pressures. There is a *'performance cult'* to do with success and winning which it is easy for parents to get sucked into. Healthy goals for the child need to conform to his or her interests and capacities, rather than the interests of the parents, and what the parents think their child can achieve.

It is vital to help a child develop good self esteem, and the keys to this are twofold:

1. Those people whom the child considers important in his or her life need to provide **positive, constructive reactions**.
2. By highlighting a child's **small progressions and successes** along the way, we as parents help confirm the child's positive self esteem.

For parents who are perhaps not at the moment following the ideal path in terms of their contribution to their child's development in sport, Melanie finished on a very positive note, by stressing that it is never too late for a parent to change. And when a parent does change, the player quite quickly benefits from the new attitudes.