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All in the GAME of LOVE

Running the men's professional tennis circuit, the ATP provides a truly global tour comprising 62 tournaments in 32 countries and featuring some of the most recognisable athletes in world sport.

Images by Ed Wright

Laurent Delanney, CEO of ATP Europe and ATP Commercial Director, first developed a passion for tennis during his youth. Playing the sport as a child, he never could have imagined that this childhood interest would set the trajectory for his professional career. "After college in Los Angeles, in the US, I came back to Europe and after two years working in the family business, which was in women's fashion, I found my way to what was my passion—sports and sports marketing.

"Thanks to the confidence of the directors at the sports-marketing agency ProServ, which was what it was called at the time, I worked for a number of years, around seven years, at ProServ based in Paris, which is the European headquarters. I was managing

professional tennis players, ranging from junior up-and-coming players to superstars like Yannick Noah, who at the time was French Open champion, world number three, and a big star internationally and certainly in France. I also worked on some events including the tournament in Antwerp, which handed out a gold and diamond racket as its trophy."

Working with ProServ gave Laurent his first real taste of the sporting industry, working with major players like Ivan Lendl and Gabriela Sabatini once they came to Europe. "After that, I went back to school for two years in New York and I was hired by Club Med there as their creative director, working on the marketing and the advertising of Club Med in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Three years later, 20 years ago now, I was hired by ATP to move to

Monaco, which is the European headquarters of the ATP, as the European director of marketing.

"Since then, in those 20 years, I have always been involved in a marketing and commercial aspect, commercial mainly being the sales and the management of our global tour sponsors. More recently, in 2009, I was given the responsibility of the European region overall, which means overseeing the governance of the tour for the 32 tournaments that we have in Europe, as well as the management of our headquarters in Monte Carlo. I currently have two hats: one as head of the European region, and the other as global head of sales. And that takes us to today."

As CEO of ATP Europe, Laurent is responsible for the governance of the region, which includes the calendar and the different aspects >



of running a tournament as part of ATP's world circuit. Laurent's role as Commercial Director for the whole group means he has a global responsibility to ATP's sponsorship partners. This means finding, negotiating, contracting, and subsequently implementing, contracts with partners like Rolex, Ricoh, and Moët & Chandon.

Laurent notes that the ATP is unique in the sense that it's a membership organisation with both player and tournament members under a single umbrella company. "It is a unique structure in sports where the most common structure is an employee to employer relationship; that's not the case for the ATP World Tour, which has a very democratic system in place from top to bottom. It is a constant challenge and an opportunity for us to work and strike the right balance for the benefit of both of our key constituents: the players and the tournaments. That means that it can be a challenging process; however, it has proven itself to be

beneficial to players and to tournaments to have a voice and to be around the table for every major strategic decision that the tour makes.

"When I talk about a democratic system, it's not only at the board level, which is the top decision-making level where you have three representatives for the players and three representatives for the tournaments plus our Executive Chairman & President, which constitutes the board. We also have representation by a player council, which is a number of players representing all of the players, and then a tournament council on the other side, which represents all of the tournament members. From bottom up, you have all players, a player council, and then the board, and a mirrored structure on the other side."

According to Laurent, two of the most emotive issues that ATP faces on a regular basis from players and tournament members relate to prize money and the calendar. "To

that effect, we've been working hard this year to try and determine long-term solutions for both those areas with the objective of defining prize money and the calendar through to 2018.

"This will provide a period of stability for the tour, giving promoters a long-term assurance of when their events will take place, as well as how much they will be paying across that period. Having this period of stability will then allow us to take a fresh look at our sport from top to bottom and see if we are operating at optimum levels.

"This could include everything from our tournament structure, player commitments, the Challenger Tour, the ranking system, our product on television, or any potential innovations to the playing format. At the end of it, we may determine that we need to make some changes; or we may come out and determine that the status quo works best. But it's important for the sport that we do go through this review process."

Heading up the European region means Laurent is responsible for the greatest number of tournaments within the ATP World Tour; 32 in total, which is a massive number of events to co-ordinate annually. "We have long swings that are in the European region; probably the longest goes from April, when the tournaments come to Europe for the clay-court season, and then the grass-court season, and then a little bit of clay court again. So really from April to mid-July, the tournaments are in Europe.

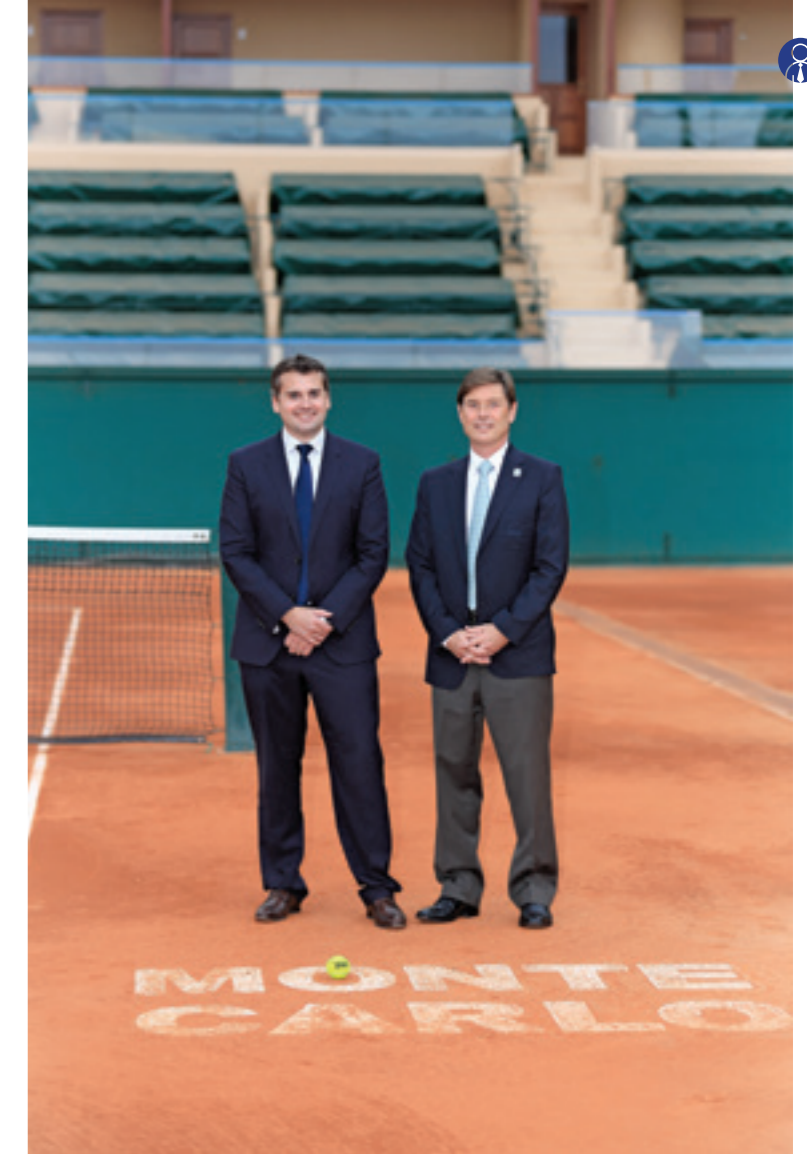
"For our staff in Europe, it's a number of events to travel to, to monitor, and work with. But we're proud of the events that we have; many of the tournaments are longstanding and have been on the tour since its inception in 1990. In terms of challenges and opportunities, we also look at the balance that we have between these longstanding, traditional events—great tournaments like Monte Carlo and Rome—and new opportunities in new markets."

One of the ATP's greatest strengths comes from the global nature of the tour. "I think many sports leagues would be envious of our global footprint. We're fortunate that the demand for our tournaments across the globe is high. Tournaments either want to become a higher category of event (ATP World Tour 250, 500, or Masters 1000), or some regions want new events.

"In terms of markets, Europe is the traditional cornerstone of the ATP World Tour. From the historic clay-court venues of Monte Carlo, Rome, and Barcelona to indoor events in Paris, Rotterdam, Basel, and many more, Europe can lay claim to more than half of the 62 events on the ATP World Tour. Managing the ATP World Tour annual calendar is a complex matter. It's a fine balancing act—if you move one piece of the puzzle, it has a knock-on effect on the rest of the calendar. So, we're constantly looking at the calendar to try and reach the best possible solution

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- Laurent Delanney



for all our stakeholders—having the right number and category of tournaments in the right weeks, which works in the best way for player flow, and telling the overall story of the season.

"While we are generally not looking to add new events to the tour at this current point in time, the calendar does constantly evolve. To that effect, and relating specifically to Europe, Istanbul will host an event in 2015 which formerly took place in Belgrade. It's the first time that the ATP will hold an event in Turkey. We're excited to be entering a new and important market there."

Laurent believes that the foundation of ATP is the sport of tennis itself. "The ATP World Tour is sport in the purest sense. Tennis is a one-on-one, gladiatorial battle between two top, world-class athletes and it is a sport that

requires a unique combination of athleticism, technical skill, and mental strength. It's a very fast, athletic game of tactics played at a high pace. And it is a sport where you're on your own on court and you have to make your own decisions until what can be a very unpredictable end.

"Our job is to be able to really live up and showcase the level that is reached by the players and the sport, and to provide the best possible stage for that fantastic competition. I think like the sport itself, in terms of values. The ATP World Tour is intense, dynamic, and constantly striving to improve and to build on the heritage that we have with modern-day opportunities."

One of the most important roles of ATP is to maintain the integrity of tennis. "When it comes down to it, nothing is more important than >



collaborate successfully with all governing bodies.

“A number of enhancements have been made to the Tennis Anti-Doping Programme in the past 18 months, with the introduction of the athlete biological passport, more out-of-competition testing and increased blood testing. Greater investments have been made. Things are going in the right direction and we’ll continue to work with the other governing bodies to ensure that we have a rigorous program, and that we’re benchmarking well against what other sports are doing in this area.”

Laurent’s passion for tennis and the work his company does is mirrored by the spirit and enthusiasm of his staff. “I think we’re very lucky in the organisation to have staff that are hugely passionate about the sport. We are actually quite a lean organisation and, to some extent, quite a close-knit family. There are only 90 full-time staff at the ATP worldwide. Along with their passion, they hold a strong loyalty to the organisation. There are many long-serving staff, like myself, that have been at the ATP for 20 or more years. I think that’s critical because, like many organisations, it’s all about the

protecting the integrity of the sport—doing everything we can to ensure a level playing field is essential. That’s something that all the governing bodies in the sport—across the ATP, Grand Slams, ITF, and WTA—have recognised and come together in a joint effort to maintain.

“We have a good relationship and open dialogue with all the governing bodies, and we continue to work closely with them on a number of different areas. The establishment of initiatives such as the Tennis Anti-Doping Programme and the Tennis Integrity Unit are just two examples of ways in which we

people that are behind it, and without the quality and experience of the people that work with us, we wouldn’t be able to drive the business forward the way we have been able to over the past 25 years.

“The challenges are that the organisation is global, as is the nature of our tour, and we are therefore very spread out; we have offices in Florida, Monte Carlo, London, and in Sydney, and we also have a combination of staff that are more office-based and staff that are constantly on the road. That requires management and everybody in the organisation to have a focus on internal communication and good sharing of information. These are all critical when you have a global organisation of our type. We are strict about designing business plans, usually on a rotating three-year basis, that we keep up to date for that term. We closely follow the implementation of that business plan and we ensure our decisions and initiatives are coherent with the strategy and the objectives of the business plans. I think that all helps to keep the staff aligned with the company goals.”

With such a spread-out, global workforce, a key focus for ATP is

communication within the organisation. “We have meetings with the board and with our constituents—the tournaments and the players—at least four times a year. We have a process so that senior management is able to get feedback from our player and our tournament constituents, that the board is then able to consider. We also have global senior management meetings and conference calls at regular intervals; we have conference calls on a bi-monthly basis so that we are able to keep consistency across the different regions.

“We are structured in three regions: North and South America is one, Europe is another, and Asia-Pacific and the Middle East is the other. So we stay consistent across those three different regions. This year at our end-of-year event, the Barclays ATP World Tour finals in London at The O2, we are actually gathering all of our staff worldwide. Many of the staff have operational roles at the tournaments already, given that we organise the event directly ourselves, but the staff that don’t have operational roles at the event will be attending as well.

“Everyone is gathering in London so that we can have two or three days with everyone in the company to be able to meet, share some time together across the different offices and different regions, and just have that opportunity for greater communication between everyone within the organisation. That will actually be the first time we’ve done it; it’s a new initiative from our Executive Chairman & President Chris Kermode, who started in January.”

As Commercial Director for ATP, Laurent understands the great value of the company’s global footprint to sponsors and partners. “The ATP World Tour is one of the few truly global sponsorship

“Ricoh’s partnership with the ATP is built on a true understanding of our business needs and its unique, collaborative approach has allowed us to put together a program that has evolved with our strategic objectives over the past 10 years.” - Javier Diez-Aguirre, Director, Corporate Marketing, Ricoh Europe



propositions. We have 62 tournaments that are in 32 countries around the world and they are all under one roof, which is the ATP World Tour. For sponsors that are looking to build a worldwide sponsorship platform, we work with those sponsors to build a package that can target their priority and key markets very specifically, as well as giving them an umbrella ATP partnership with year-long activation opportunities in areas like digital and social media.

“Next year, Ricoh will be celebrating its 10th anniversary of our partnership. We’re proud of these long-term partnerships that continue and develop over time, as has been the case with Ricoh. Rolex is partner of many of our premium events in tennis and many other sports. Our

collaboration with Rolex started with their partnership in the Barclays ATP World Tour finals, which is one of the most prestigious events in our sport and the biggest indoor tennis tournament in the world.

“Again, the relationship with Rolex grew and developed over time, so that Rolex became a global tour partner working with us directly on a number of digital-media initiatives. The partnership with ATP allows Rolex to leverage their association directly with a number of tournaments on the tour including Shanghai, Monte Carlo, Canada, and many other events that we have. We work very closely with all of our sponsors on a year-round basis. We organise workshops that gather all of our sponsors twice a year, which enables them to meet, to feel part





of a group, to exchange, and potentially create and engage in cross promotions between them and develop some new business opportunities, which we certainly encourage.”

Technology and social media are becoming more and more critical for the ATP as a new channel to reach and communicate directly with fans. “This invaluable resource has become a priority for us since it allows fans to have a broader view of the players, far exceeding the limitations of broadcast television. Social media is a more direct and fun way for fans to learn about players and communicate with them and with ATP.”

Laurent understands that the organisation has an obligation to players and tournaments to help coordinate this channel of communication and embrace the ongoing changes of technology and

social media. “The emergence and development of social media, and more broadly digital media, over the last decade have presented the sport with a wealth of new opportunities. More than 45 million people follow the ATP and our players and tournaments on social media. So it’s an area that we’re fully investing in on a day-to-day basis as we look for deeper and more regular ways of engaging with our worldwide fan base.

“One of our strengths as a sport is the sheer volume of content that we’re able to produce throughout the year. Our season starts in January and goes through to mid-November. In addition to the ATP World Tour, we have approximately 150 events on the ATP Challenger Tour. The appetite for our content in the digital-media sphere is big, and to a large degree we are able to effectively satisfy that demand with the

number of events we have taking place across different time zones on a weekly basis. To that extent, we’ve seen significant new revenue streams coming in through live streaming and data distribution over the past five years. It’s a fast-changing landscape, and a very exciting one at that.

“Our website *ATPWorldTour.com* receives approximately four million unique users per month and continues to be a driving force behind our marketing efforts. We’re continuously looking for new ways of engaging with our fans via digital media. For instance, last year during the season-ending Barclays ATP World Tour Finals, we incorporated a live show—Holding Court Live presented by Barclays—which streamed twice daily via our website from the Fan Zone at The O2, giving fans online insight and behind-the-scenes access into our year-end event. The show will continue to take place again this year. At the end of the day, we operate in the sports and entertainment business. It’s a competitive landscape and in this day and age the demand on people’s discretionary income is high. We’re aware that we cannot stand still, and that our events need to become more than just tennis tournaments, so these types of new offerings are very important.

“In addition, in my capacity as Commercial Director for the ATP globally, I’m pleased to say that we will shortly be announcing an innovative new official partnership in the social-media world, which will provide fans with a new and exciting way to engage with our sport. Stay tuned for more information on that over the coming weeks.”

“As far as the tournaments and the players, we’re also working continuously in partnership with our tournaments, including from a marketing point of view with marketing campaigns that are produced centrally by the ATP and providing tournaments with marketing materials that they’re



able to use. We also hold regular tournament workshops.

“On the player side, we work with them, including with a program called the ATP University, which is when young players break into the top 200 players in the world. It’s mandatory for them to participate in this ATP University program where we cover different themes ranging from calendar to media, medical, sponsorship, and representation—really preparing them for what to expect at the top level of the game on the ATP World Tour.”

Laurent is proud of the growth the organisation has had over recent years and anticipates even more expansion and success in the future, particularly considering the calibre of players that are coming up through the global ranks. “We’ve had growth in attendance at our tournaments, which is up to 4.5 million spectators worldwide.

We’ve had growth in our TV viewership, which is about 840 million dedicated TV viewers, and that is a 75-per-cent growth since 2008. We’ve had a 200-per-cent increase in commercial revenue since 2009. And we’ve also had tremendous growth in social media with more than 45 million people following the ATP and our player members and tournament members on social-media channels.

“I think we’re well positioned to see a continuation of that growth. It is based on the intrinsic strength of the sport itself and certainly carried by the incredible generation of players that we have had in recent years and we’ll continue to have. I think there are some exciting years ahead where we’ll continue to have the household names that are being pushed more and more by a younger generation of players that

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are knocking on the door to be able to break through.

“So whether it’s Federer continuing to play, whether it’s Nadal continuing to play, whether it’s Djokovic or Murray who are both 27 years old and have a number of years in front of them, or whether it’s exciting new champions like Kei Nishikori from Japan who was a finalist in the US Open, or Grigor Dimitrov who is a very charismatic player, or Milos Raonic from Canada, the tension that there’s going to be in the next few years as those players try to break the stranglehold that the top four players have had over recent years is going to make for some captivating stories. And we can expect that that will continue to grow the attendance, the TV viewership, and fuel increased commercial opportunities that we’ll be able to leverage for the ATP for tournaments and for the players themselves.”

