

Using Your Head *to Play* Championship Tennis



A TENNIS PLAYER'S
WORKBOOK
FOR DEVELOPING
MENTAL TOUGHNESS

DR. ALAN GOLDBERG

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INTRODUCTION



In every sport at the highest levels, the very best athletes always say the same things when they're asked about the secrets to their success. You have to develop good mechanics and proper technique. You have to have a solid tactical and strategic understanding of the game. You have to develop and maintain a superior level of physical strength and conditioning. Lastly, and surely not least, you have to have your head on straight at crunch time. What this last secret is all about is that if you want to take your game as far as possible, if you want to play at the next level, then you can't do it by simply just training the physical dimension of tennis. You also have to train mentally. You have to develop mental toughness.

Let me put it in simple terms: Do you really want to play to your potential? Do you have some big, scary dreams that you would desperately like to achieve? If so, then your success in this endeavor is at least 95% physical and 5% mental in practice. Simply put, there is no substitute for hard work and perseverance in the pursuit of your tennis dreams. You have to pay your "physical dues" in practice. There is no physical shortcut to becoming a champion. **NONE!** However, once you step onto the court for a match, once you step onto the court for an important tryout, once the pressure of competition is turned way up high in a crucial tie-break, then your success is now 95% mental and 5 % physical. What this means is also simple. When it comes time for the match, whether you play your best or choke your guts out depends almost entirely upon what is going on between your ears!

To become a champion, you must consistently train like one. You have to be willing to do whatever it takes physically to get yourself to the next level. There is absolutely no

substitute for honest, hard work. Hanging around in front of the tube spilling snacks and soda on your face won't get you there. Cutting corners in your training and consistently dogging it whenever the coach isn't looking won't get you to the next level. You'll never reach your dreams with that kind of training behavior. Success can only become yours when your investment of physical training in practice is solid.

However, once you get into a pressured tryout or match situation, the physical side of your sport becomes much less important. In matches, your performance is 95% mental because what goes on "upstairs" determines whether you soar with the eagles or gobble with the turkeys. Your focus of concentration, ability to handle pressure, "reboundability" from mistakes, terrible calls and bad breaks, your self-confidence and mental toughness all determine whether your hard work, consistent training and skills will pay off in you playing the kind of tennis that you're capable of. Simply put, without having a "good head" on your shoulders, you'll consistently fall short of your goals on the court.

All too often tennis players will do what they need to do physically in order to get good. They'll religiously work with a trainer, practice long hours serving, drilling, and working on their return of serve, they'll study the game's strategy, build up their endurance through sprints and distance running as well as work on hitting a heavier ball. In practice their hard work is clearly visible. They play loose and relaxed, hitting consistently and aggressively. By match time there's no question that they are physically tough and ready.

However, for a lot of players, something happens during warm-up and the start of their match. It's as if they're starring in the re-make of that old movie, *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*. During the match their relaxed practice game does a disappearing act. Suddenly they're playing tight and tentatively. They stop going for their topspin shots and revert to slicing everything. They lose their aggressiveness and start pushing. They can't seem to shake their nerves!

What gives? To play your best when it counts the most you need more than just physical preparedness. You also need to be ready mentally.

If you go into your big matches or critical tryouts HOPING that you'll play your best, HOPING that you'll make a singles spot on varsity or HOPING that you won't embarrass yourself, then you're setting yourself up for some major heartache and disappointment. If you go into matches worried about a competitor, dwelling on a previous bad loss, distracted by an inconsistent or just plain doubting yourself, then you will never play to your potential.

Do NOT waste all of your hard physical work and training! Do NOT leave your mental toughness to chance. No serious tennis player would ever leave his/her physical training to chance. That would be totally foolhardy. So why leave such an important component, the mental dimension of your game out of the equation? Since your focus of concentration and ability to stay relaxed under pressure are absolute keys to playing well, why would you then go into a big match too nervous and focused on all of the wrong things? Well, you wouldn't if you had trained properly! To play like a champion you must systematically develop the mind of a champion. This workbook is designed to help you do just that: **TO THINK AND PERFORM LIKE A WINNER ON GAME DAY!**

The techniques, strategies and exercises found in this workbook are **GUARANTEED** to help you stay calm under pressure, concentrate like a winner, avoid psych-outs and intimidation, block out distractions, quickly leave disappointments, bad breaks and missed shots behind you, feel confident, believe in yourself, master last minute negative thinking and self-doubts and much more! If you **WORK** these techniques and **DO** this workbook, then I can confidently guarantee that you will significantly strengthen your level of mental toughness. If you simply read through this book once, like you would any other book, then you will find what you read to be relatively useless in the long run! Why? Simply because this is a **WORKbook**, **NOT** a **READbook**. I know all the techniques and strategies that you'll find within these pages work. I've borrowed them from elite athletes in and out of your sport through the years. However, in order for you to get them to consistently work for you on the court, in order for you to truly build the skills of mental toughness, you must consistently work them just like you would in mastering any shot!

SO HOW TOUGH ARE YOU?



TESTING YOUR CURRENT LEVEL OF MENTAL TOUGHNESS

So let's begin in the beginning with exactly where you are at mentally as a tennis player. Are you a mental toughness giant, or a 98 lb mental toughness weakling? Let's find out. Take this very simple, mental toughness questionnaire to determine exactly where your mental strengths and weaknesses lie. Having an awareness of your present strengths, and, more important, your weaknesses is the very first important step to developing the mind of a champion. After completing your mental toughness training in this workbook I would then recommend that you retake this same questionnaire. This will demonstrate how far you've come mentally and what other work is still needed.

A TENNIS PLAYER'S MENTAL TOUGHNESS QUESTIONNAIRE

HANDLING PRESSURE

(true/false answers)

1. ___ I often dread playing in those bigger matches
2. ___ I think about my opponent's size, skills or reputation before I play
3. ___ Temperature, court conditions, crowd size and specific opponent(s) usually

affect my performance negatively

4. ___ I look forward to the bigger matches
5. ___ The tougher the competition, the better my opponent, the happier I am
6. ___ I am inwardly calm and composed before I play
7. ___ I worry a lot about being outplayed or embarrassed on the court
8. ___ I frequently play better in practice than I do in big match situations
9. ___ I have the ability to calm myself when I'm too nervous
10. ___ I get physically sick before certain tryouts/matches/tournaments
11. ___ My pre-match self-talk is mostly negative and full of doubts
12. ___ I have trouble trusting my training and skills when it comes time to put it all on the line
13. ___ I play better against weaker opponents
14. ___ Some people on my team would call me a "head case"
15. ___ I love playing tie-breakers
16. ___ More often than not I'm too nervous to play to my potential
17. ___ I seem to often get outplayed by players who I know I'm better than
18. ___ I frequently get sick or injured right before bigger matches and tournaments
19. ___ I'd much rather practice than compete
20. ___ "Choking" under pressure is a close friend of mine
21. ___ I tend to play better in unimportant matches vs. more critical ones
22. ___ I can never seem to make my hard work and extra training pay off

CONCENTRATION

1. ___ I am easily distracted
2. ___ I often focus on other players before the start of my matches
3. ___ I often think about past poor performances before I play
4. ___ Once the match starts, I tend to focus too much on my opponent
5. ___ I think too much when I play
6. ___ I have the ability to block out negatives & doubts before the match
7. ___ I usually only focus on one or two things when I play
8. ___ I tend to compare myself with my opponents during the match

9. ___ I worry a lot about letting others down
10. ___ I can easily lock my focus on the game and point as I play
11. ___ My mind has a tendency to drift too much before matches
12. ___ I focus a lot on the outcome before and during my match
13. ___ If I have a bad warm up, I can't seem to play well
14. ___ I mentally jump ahead of myself during the match and entertain the "what if's"
15. ___ There are certain opponents that I can't seem to play well against
16. ___ I tend to get distracted by what others say or do before and during the match
17. ___ When I lose my focus I can quickly bring it back
18. ___ When I play, I mostly don't think

HANDLING ADVERSITY (MENTAL REBOUNDING)

1. ___ I can't seem to shake the disappointment of a bad match
2. ___ I have certain matches during the season where I always perform poorly
3. ___ If my first few games are bad, the rest of the match is usually bad
4. ___ I usually believe that a bad warm-up will negatively affect my play
5. ___ If I blow an easy shot or lose my serve, it stays with me a long time
6. ___ Disappointments and failures motivate me to work harder
7. ___ I have the ability to quickly let go of my mistakes and bad games
8. ___ If I get called for foot faulting, I can't stop thinking about it
9. ___ When a call goes against me and it's unfair, it sticks to me like glue
10. ___ I believe that I learn much more from my failures than successes
11. ___ Injuries make me want to pack it all up and quit
12. ___ If I miss several shots in a row, I get discouraged
13. ___ Losses and setbacks make me feel like I'll never succeed
14. ___ With all my failures I often question why I keep playing this game
15. ___ I deliberately use the memory of bad matches to push myself harder in practice on a daily basis
16. ___ When the going gets tough, I tend to quit

17. ___ After a loss or bad match, I look for what I can do better next time
18. ___ When bad things happen, I always think, "why me?"
19. ___ If I've been outplayed by certain players a few times before, I tend to give up too easily when I play them again
20. ___ When I lose, there are usually correctable reasons for it.

WINNING ATTITUDE

1. ___ I tend to see the glass of milk as always "half full"
2. ___ I believe that I can do anything that I set my mind to
3. ___ I build my successes on my failures
4. ___ Other's negativity always seems to get to me
5. ___ When I play badly, I tend to make excuses
6. ___ I hate playing on certain courts and against certain players
7. ___ The more of my teammates I can get to play harder, the better I feel
8. ___ I love being pushed by my coach
9. ___ It really annoys me when my teammates outplay me in practice
10. ___ I like to pace myself through a long practice so I don't get too tired
11. ___ It really bothers me when I see teammates cut corners
12. ___ My coach would call me a whiner
13. ___ When I play badly at a big tournament, it's usually the court, my opponent or the weather's fault
14. ___ "Can't" and "never" aren't words in my vocabulary
15. ___ If I can't be the star, there's no point in trying hard
16. ___ I have an easy time finding things to complain about
17. ___ I am a positive person
18. ___ I tend to get threatened by other's successes
19. ___ I live, "when the going gets tough, the tough get going"
20. ___ If you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything

Scoring: Score one point for each answer that matches the answer on this scoring key.
If your answer doesn't match, assign a value of zero.

KEY

PRESSURE	CONCENTRATION	ADVERSITY	ATTITUDE
1. F	F	F	T
2. F	F	F	T
3. F	F	F	T
4. T	F	F	F
5. T	F	F	F
6. T	T	T	F
7. F	T	T	T
8. F	F	F	T
9. T	F	F	F
10.F	T	T	F
11.F	F	F	T
12.F	F	F	F
13.F	F	F	F
14.F	F	F	T
15.T	F	T	F
16.F	F	F	F
17.F	T	T	T
18.F	T	F	F
19.F		F	T
20.F		T	T
21.F			
22.F			

SCORING – MENTAL TOUGHNESS QUESTIONNAIRE

There are a total of 80 possible points that you can get on this little test. If you answer these questions honestly and score between 72-80, then you are mentally tough as nails and should be traveling around the country with me conducting mental toughness workshops. If you score between 64- 71, then you are pretty solid mentally. Scores between 56-63 indicate that you are weak mentally and scores below 55 suggest that your head is definitely getting in the way of your playing.

Examine your answers in each of the four categories listed for directions into which area of mental toughness training you need to work on improving. For example, if you score 14 out of a possible 20 on the “handling pressure” section, it would be very useful for you to spend more time on these techniques in this workbook. Keep in mind that no matter what your score, you can always strengthen your mental toughness muscles and that’s what this training program is all about.



STEP ONE



DEVELOPING AWARENESS

In order for you to learn to do your best when it counts the most, you must first develop AWARENESS of what you are currently doing mentally that may very well be getting in your way. You can't correct mistakes and strengthen weaknesses without knowing exactly what these are! For example, if you keep attacking an opponent's backhand and getting beaten, then you won't be able to constructively change this strategic mistake until you become aware of exactly what you're actually doing that's not working!

You started this process of developing awareness by taking the Mental Toughness Questionnaire. Hopefully this has given you some general ideas of what exactly is getting you into hot water, performance-wise. Now let's get a bit more specific. Remember, without an awareness of your mental mistakes, you'll never be able to begin to build mental toughness. AWARENESS IS YOUR VERY FIRST KEY TO CHANGE.

There are three basic areas that you need to develop an awareness of in order to systematically build mental toughness:

1. SELF-TALK or what I call your "INNER COACH."
2. FOCUS OF CONCENTRATION
3. LEVEL OF PRE-MATCH NERVOUSNESS or EXCITEMENT

DEVELOPING AN AWARENESS OF YOUR “INNER COACH.”

“Matches are won and lost before the start and before the final point.” Dr. G

Do you know what this statement means? Your pre- match and during- match thoughts or self-talk, that is, the dialogue of what I call your “inner coach” dramatically affects how loose and relaxed you are, how well you are able to handle fatigue, your level of self-confidence and how well you’ll play. The wrong kind of “inner coaching” will tighten you up, undercut your confidence, slow you down and trip you up. So let’s discover just what kind of “inner coach” you have working for you.

DISCOVERING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOUR GOOD & BAD MATCHES:

EXERCISE: PART 1 – “THE INNER COACHING OF BAD PERFORMANCES.”

Sit down, close your eyes and mentally review, in as much detail as possible a previous bad match. Remember where the match was held, the type of surface you played on, who your opponent was, who might have been watching, the weather, what might have been at stake, etc. Specifically, I would like you to “zoom in” on what you were thinking to yourself as you were warming up, right before the match started and then as the first game unfolded. What kind of “inner coaching” was going on? Next, recall what you were thinking about during the first set. For example, what went through your mind if you got broken your very first service game. What did you think if you blew several, easy break chances, when you missed an easy passing shot, hit an overhead into the net, heard comments from the crowd, were called for a foot fault, got hooked on a bad call on game point or otherwise made an unforced error? If your opponent was playing out of his/her mind or trying to get into your head, what “inner coaching” went on? Take a moment right now to jot down in as much detail as possible the answers to the questions on Worksheet #1, “Self-talk & Bad Performances.” When you’ve finished, answer the very same questions for at least two more bad matches.

Now, compare your answers and see if you can discover a pattern between all of your bad outings. Usually you’ll find that right before and during your bad matches, you think very similar kinds of things. Your “inner coaching” is frequently negative, confidence eroding and non-stop. Oftentimes it fills you with dread and raises your anxiety level, making it all but impossible to play the kind of loose and relaxed tennis that you’re capable of.

Purpose: Examining several of your bad matches in this way will help you come to really get to “know” your bad inner coach. Remember, before you can change negative “inner coaching” to positive, you must first become aware of your typical patterns of negativity. Once you get a handle on what you typically say to yourself both before and during your bad matches, you will then be in a much better position to begin to turn this negative coaching around. However, if you have no awareness of the specific ways that you’re being negative, then you will continue to bring yourself down without any chance for constructive change.

PART 2 –“THE INNER COACHING OF GOOD PERFORMANCES”

Next, pick several of your best performances, matches where you were extremely satisfied with how well you played, where you were relaxed and “on.” Examining them one at a time, vividly review each great performance in relation to your “inner coaching.” What were you thinking about before the match? What were you thinking about during warm-up? In the first game? What kind of thoughts or self-talk, if any, did you have during the first set? When things got tough or stressful what did you think? If you got broken or blew three service break chances in a row, what did you think? If you’re opponent hooked you or tried playing head games with you, what did you “hear” from your inner coach? Write down all of your typical “inner coaching” for each of these good performances and record them on Worksheet #2 “Self-talk & Good Performances.” Next, compare all three or four of these good matches to see if there is a pattern of “inner coaching” that accompanies your best performances. If you’re anything like most tennis players out there, then you should be able to discover a consistent pattern here.

PART 3 “COMPARE AND CONTRAST”

Finally, take the self-talk worksheets #1 and #2 that you compiled and compare them. You should begin to see a significant difference in your “inner coaching” between your best and worst matches.

WHAT DOES THIS DIFFERENCE REALLY MEAN?

Your awareness of the differences in self-talk between your best and worst performances forms a critical first step in being able to “retrain” your “inner coach.” For example, if you know the typical self-talk that always seems to accompany your worst tennis, as well as the self-talk that goes with your best, then you are in a position to begin to turn the negative around before it leads to another bad match. For example,

let's say that after an unforced error that would have given you a crucial service break, you hear things like, "How could you miss that shot!??? God, your forehand REALLY sucks! You can NEVER play well against this guy! You're just a choker!" Letting this kind of negative self-talk run uninterrupted in your head will very quickly undermine your confidence, raise your stress level and completely destroy your game. This is why it is so critical that you immediately become aware of when your inner coaching turns negative like this so that you can take some steps to turn it around. Without this awareness, you are doomed to continue to sabotage yourself into playing poorly.



STEP TWO



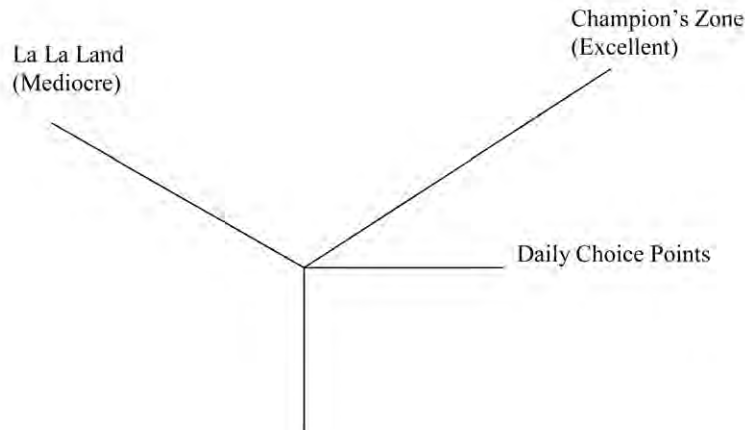
MOTIVATION: TAKING YOUR GAME TO THE NEXT LEVEL

So how badly do you want it? Do you really want to take your tennis game to the next level? Are you doing everything possible in your training towards this end or are you inadvertently sabotaging yourself and holding yourself back? In other words, what is the quality of your training like? What kind of an investment are you making in your tennis future on a daily basis? Are you “depositing” gold bullion whenever you train or are you chocking up a whole bunch of wooden nickels and Monopoly money? Your future success on the court is almost completely in your hands and depends upon HOW you train.

So let’s start with a very basic question: “DO YOU KNOW WHAT ROAD YOU’RE ON?” You see, every day when you train, you’re on a road just like the one depicted in figure #1. Everyday that road forks many, many times. And, as an athlete, you have a decision to make many, many times a day. What fork am I going to take? All too often tennis players make this decision over and over again and have absolutely no awareness of which road they are choosing. As a result, they end up making choices that might not be in their best interests, choices that won’t help them get to their goals.

Let’s look at Fig. #1 more closely. There are basically two different paths that you can follow in relation to tennis and your life. When you take the left fork enough times, you’ll end up in a “wondrous” place I call “La La Land.” If you get into the habit of taking the left fork, you’ll ultimately achieve “supreme mediocrity.” Simply put, you’ll become unbelievably average! However, when you consistently take the right fork, you will eventually find yourself in “The Champions’ Zone.” The Champions’ Zone is

one of those places where you will be stalked by success! It will pounce on you every chance it gets. What do each of these paths actually look like?



(figure 1)

Let's say that you're in the middle of practice, feeling really tired and the coach wants you to run sprints. As the sprints begin you notice that the coach stops watching. You then think to yourself, "I'm whipped! Time to chill," and then you deliberately slow down. When you do this, whether you know it or not, you have just made a decision to take the left fork. Or perhaps your backhand isn't nearly as strong as your forehand, and you know you should be spending time practicing it. However, it's no fun to practice something that you're not good at, so you run around your backhand every chance you get! That decision, every time you make it, helps send you down the left fork. Or maybe your friends want you to go party with them on a night before a big tournament and you know you shouldn't go, that you need the sleep and you should be resting your legs and body. However, you don't want to miss out on all of the fun so you go anyway. Guess what road you're on with that decision? You bet! You've just taken that left fork to La La Land again.

Now it's obvious what the right road would be in each of these instances. When you're in the middle of doing sprints and your body is screaming for mercy, you think, "this is my chance to lift the level of my game" and so you go even harder. When your coach suggests that you work on making your backhand more consistent you think, "I'm not very good at this and it's really frustrating, but I know that you're only as strong as your weakest link," and so you put the time into strengthening that weakness. When your buddies want to stay out late and party you think, "Yeah, it would be really fun to do that, but my tennis and this tournament are much more important to me," and

so you apologize to them and don't go, regardless of all the crap that they might heap on you!

Let me ask you an obvious question here: Which is the easier road to take? The road to La La Land of course! It takes no character, discipline or special effort to take the left fork, which is exactly why so many tennis players do so. The right fork to the Champions' Zone is a far more difficult one. When you go the right way, you end up having to sacrifice. You have to continuously push yourself outside of your comfort zone. The right fork is more frustrating and involves setbacks and failures. The road to the Champions' Zone takes much longer and involves real suffering. So another question readily arises:

Why should anyone in their right mind bother taking the right road? Why put yourself through all that suffering, aggravation and hardship? Isn't it so much easier just to go down the left fork and not have to work up a sweat.

How you answer this question is absolutely critical for you as an athlete. You can say that you'll take the right road because it's more rewarding or it'll make you feel much better about yourself or you'll accomplish far more in your life. You can say that with the right road ultimately you'll become successful. All these answers are true.

However, you'll take the right fork, the right road for **ONE MAIN REASON! YOU WANT TO!** You'll take the right road if **YOU** have an emotionally compelling reason to. There has to be something down that right fork that **YOU** really want, that's really important to **YOU**. You can't take the right fork because it's just the right thing to do. You can't take it because you have a lot of talent and it will please your parents if you do so. You can't take it for the coaches. You have to do it because **YOU WANT IT!**

In other words you have to have what I call a "**BIG ENOUGH WHY**," some personal goal, dream or mission that has captured your heart and imagination and provides you with ample enough reason to sacrifice, work hard, and do whatever it takes to become successful. Your **BIG ENOUGH WHY** can be trying to break into the singles line-up, to play #1 on the varsity, to achieve a certain ranking locally, regionally or even nationally. Your **BIG ENOUGH WHY** could be to earn a college scholarship to a D-1 program or even make it on the pro tour.

With a "**BIG ENOUGH WHY**" that truly belongs to **YOU** and no one else, it will be much easier for you to make the right choices when you get to that crossroad. In fact, it's when you're at the crossroad and being emotionally pulled down the left fork that you need that "**Big Enough Why**" the most. If you can consistently remind yourself of why you're training whenever the going gets really rough, then you'll get tough

and keep on going in the right direction. It's the thought of your big goal or dream in practice that will help you stay motivated and on track. In fact, you want to be able to consistently ask yourself in practice, "How is what I'm doing today/right now going to help me get to my goal?"

HOW IS WHAT I'M DOING TODAY GOING TO HELP ME GET TO MY GOAL?

This question will help you raise the quality and intensity of your training. It will give your practices both a meaning and purpose. It will help you take responsibility for your training and cut down on those times where you just seem to be going through the motions out there. It will help you learn and improve faster. Ultimately, this question will help you turn your tennis dream into a reality. You don't want to be out-to-lunch when you train. Keeping your "BIG WHY" in mind during practice will always insure that you're not!

Let me tell you a personal story about how my BIG ENOUGH WHY in tennis was first born. I was a pretty decent athlete with good hand and eye coordination that I had honed on the ping pong table in my basement. When I was 12, I took those skills to the tennis court and began playing against my friends. After a summer of being able to beat up on all of my tennis friends, none of whom had ever played seriously or had formal training, I got it in my head that I should enter a local tournament.

In the first round of this, my very first tournament, I was matched up against a real tennis player 2 years my senior. In less than 30 minutes he beat me 6-0, 6-0, running me around like I was a wind-up toy, corner to corner, baseline to net and back. I don't think I even won a point in this mis-"match" and afterwards I looked like I had just been run over by a Mack truck. I was exhausted, soaking wet with sweat, totally disheveled with bloodied knees from the few times I had fallen trying to retrieve some of my opponents shots. My opponent, on the other hand looked like he had just come out for a photo shoot. There wasn't a bead of perspiration anywhere on his face and not a single hair was out of place.

However, there was one thing that I found especially upsetting. I didn't care that I had lost so badly. I didn't care that I hadn't won a point. I didn't even care that I looked like an idiot in the process. What I DID care about was that for the entire 28 minutes of this match, he had been making fun of me with a friend who had been watching from behind the fence. They were laughing and joking about how badly I played, just loud enough for me to get the gist of what was going on.

I was very small as a 12 year old and had learned the hard way that small people really need to keep their mouths shut. So when I went up to him to shake his hands after the match, he smiled at me, looked me straight in the eyes and said, "That was a great match you just played!" Now, of course, he was being a condescending you-know-what. So as I shook his hand I thought to myself; "I don't care what it takes....I don't care how long it takes...I don't care how hard I have to work....YOU are MINE!!! I will own you!"

Behold the birth of a BIG ENOUGH WHY, born out of fantasies of revenge and retribution! For the rest of that summer, I played tennis 12 hours a day, every day! When it was raining and most intelligent people were inside, I would hit for hours against a backboard. When school started, I would come home, do my homework and then go to the courts. I even began to take lessons, where I discovered to my great dismay how bad a tennis player I really was! In the winter when it was too cold to be outside, I'd head to the indoor courts, do my homework and then hit with anyone I could until the place closed.

One year later, in the very same tournament, I got to play that same player again. This time the match lasted 45 minutes. This time the score was still 6-0, 6-0. And this time, my condescending opponent still beat me. One year later, but it just took him just a little longer and in this match, I actually won a few points! By this time, my need for revenge had all but disappeared. I had fallen in love with the game and wanted to get as good as I possibly could. Towards this end, I continued to train as if tennis was the very most important thing in my life (which, back then, it actually was!).

The very next July, two years after my original drubbing, I faced this guy for the third time in this same local tournament. I beat him 6-1, 6-1, totally frustrating him in the process. From that day on, I indeed owned him and he never got more than a few games from me whenever we played after that!

So just what road are YOU on whenever YOU practice? Are you motivated to head to the Champion's Zone or do your interests lie in exploring the hills and dales of La La Land? Answer the following questions to find out:

Use True (T) or False (F) answers.

1. ___ I have a clear "Big Enough Why" in tennis
2. ___ I think about my big goal at least once or twice a day during practice
3. ___ I am frequently bored in practice and often don't see the point of what I'm doing
4. ___ I have a purpose/something specific that I want to work on in each practice that I attend
5. ___ I frequently have a tough time getting up for practice
6. ___ I usually ease back a bit whenever I get tired in training
7. ___ I regularly put in extra time outside of practice to work on my weaknesses and strengthen my strengths
8. ___ I don't have a specific BIG WHY other than I love this game and want to get as good as possible
9. ___ My motto is "if it hurts in practice, it's just not worth doing."
10. ___ I don't see the point in practicing hard if I'm never going to be the best..
11. ___ When the going gets rough, I go harder
12. ___ I'd much prefer to hang out with my friends than train
13. ___ I find myself thinking about my tennis goals outside of practice
14. ___ I can always find something positive to get out of even the most boring of practices
15. ___ I often question why I'm playing this game

SCORING & INTERPRETATION:

Correct answers equal 1 point.

1. ____ T
2. ____ T
3. ____ F
4. ____ T
5. ____ F
6. ____ F
7. ____ T
8. ____ T
9. ____ F
10. ____ F
11. ____ T
12. ____ F
13. ____ T
14. ____ T
15. ____ F

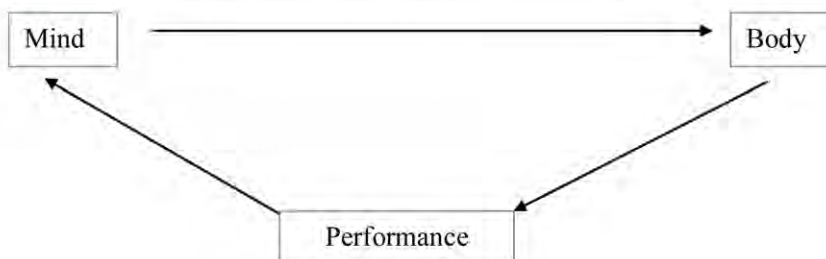
There are a total of 15 points that you can get as a high score. The higher your score, the more directed and motivated you are in your pursuit of the Champion's Zone. Scores between 12 and 15 indicate that you are making excellent use of training and are almost consistently taking the right fork. Scores between 8 and 11 indicate that your motivation is a bit off and you're not getting the most out of practice that you could. Scores between 4 and 7 indicate that you are seriously holding yourself back because of your focus in practice and attitude about tennis. Scores lower than 4 indicate that you are a "tour guide" for La La Land and suggest that you might want to take up another sport.

STEP THREE



UNDERSTANDING THE MIND, BODY, PERFORMANCE CONNECTION

Matches are won and lost before the start and finish because of the interrelationship between your mind, body and performance. In other words, what you think or say to yourself right before and during your matches, right before your second serve, right before you start the tie-breaker goes instantly and directly into your body and touches off some subtle physiological changes. These small physical changes, in turn, significantly affect how well you'll play. (see figure #2).



MIND - WHAT ARE THE WRONG THINGS TO THINK OR SAY TO YOURSELF BEFORE OR DURING A MATCH?

Take a moment now to carefully review your pre- and during match self-talk for all your bad performances. These represent the **WRONG** things to be thinking about. For example, "I have to win this match!" "What if I choke?" "I sucked in warm-up. How can I possibly play well now?" "I have **NEVER** played well against this guy." "What if I double fault?" "What will people say if I lose to him again?" These are all thoughts that will set you up for failure. Why? Because these pre and during match thoughts distract you from the task at hand and worse, make you incredibly **NERVOUS**!

BODY – WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR BODY WHEN YOU GET NERVOUS?

First, and big time devastating, your muscles begin to tighten.

Second, your breathing speeds up and gets shallower.

Third, digestion shuts down leaving you feeling nauseous or queasy.

Fourth, your hands and feet get cold as your blood flow is diverted away from the extremities.

Fifth, your heart rate and blood pressure go up.

PERFORMANCE – HOW IS YOUR PLAY NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY THESE PHYSICAL CHANGES?

TIGHT MUSCLES – Slow your reaction time down; Slow your foot speed down. Cause you to stop moving for the ball; Shorten your reach both up at the net and in the back court. Disrupt your touch; throw you off rhythm; Kill your hitting accuracy; Shorten your stroke; Distract your focus from the play of the game; Tire you out quicker; Make you more vulnerable to injuries; Insure that you will feel the pain and fatigue of oxygen debt much more intensely once you get tired in the third set; **ALL OF THESE ADDING UP TO YOU PLAYING TO ONLY A FRACTION OF YOUR POTENTIAL!!!!!!!** Playing with tight muscles is like trying to drive a car with the emergency brake engaged! You'll go **NOWHERE** fast!

FASTER AND SHALLOWER BREATHING - Tightens your muscles even more; Throws your rhythm further off; Interferes with your normal breathing cycle; Totally and absolutely kills your endurance and makes you feel like you're completely out of shape; Makes it more difficult to quickly recover from a long rally; Further distracts you from maintaining the right game focus; Makes it impossible to think clearly and accurately react to various game situations, ALL OF THESE ADDING UP TO A SUPREMELY AWFUL MATCH!!!!!!!

COLD HANDS AND FEET – Make it that much more difficult to get a good feel of the racket and ball. Playing good tennis is all about feel and touch, and when your hands get cold, you lose it!!!

EXERCISE: USING YOUR IMAGINATION TO DEMONSTRATE THE MIND POWER OF YOUR "INNER COACH."

Try the following exercise to get a "hands on" feel for the power that your "inner coach" can wield. Stand up with your feet shoulder width apart. Take both arms and raise them so that they are perpendicular to your body, shoulder height, palms facing each other and approximately shoulder width apart. Take your left palm and rotate the palm only so that it is facing up. Next, make sure that your right thumb is pointing straight up. Next, close your eyes and imagine, in as much detail as possible that in your left hand you have a very heavy book like a Webster's unabridged dictionary. Imagine that attached to your right thumb is a string. Attached to that string is a rather large balloon and that balloon is filled with helium, a gas that rises. Repeat to yourself 3 times, very slowly "my left arm is getting heavier and heavier and falling." Now repeat three times, "my right arm is getting lighter and lighter and rising." As you do this try to really imagine the book and balloon in your hand and feel their affect. Then a second time, very slowly repeat three times, "my left arm is getting heavier and heavier and falling," followed very slowly by, "my right arm is getting lighter and lighter and rising." Finally, slowly repeat these same phrases three more times.

Purpose: What you think right before and during your matches or right before and during a tie-break will have a tremendous impact on how you end up feeling physically and emotionally and therefore, how well you'll perform. Did you notice that your left hand and arm felt much heavier or more tired than the right? If you did, you were able to create a real, physical state (heaviness or tension in that left arm) just by using your imagination. So just what kind of "inner coaching" have you been providing yourself? Are you programming things into your head that get you to reach higher and achieve your goals like that right arm? Or, like the left arm, is your "inner coaching" weighing you down and spoiling your game?

For example, are you telling yourself positive stuff like: "I love playing in the wind," "I feel good today," "My backhand is solid," "I can run all day against this guy!" "If this goes to a third set, I'm going to dominate!" "I like playing tie breakers!" Or, are you telling yourself negative stuff like: "My backhand totally sucks," "No way I can beat him/her," "I can't hit an overhead to save my life!" "I'm going to double fault, I can just feel it!" "I'm ahead 5-2, what if I can't close out this set?"



STEP FOUR



CHANGING NEGATIVE INNER COACHING TO POSITIVE

If you don't already know it just yet, **NOTHING GOOD EVER COMES FROM BEING NEGATIVE! NOTHING!** When you consistently put yourself down after an unforced error or bad break, or continually catch yourself doing things wrong, the only "good" you'll do for yourself is to kill your self-confidence and tighten your muscles. I don't have to tell you that there's nothing positive in being negative in that way!!!! Imagine you're down 1-4 in the deciding set of an important match. Tell me. How will being negative and down on your situation help you to come back and win? That's a Duh-hhh! You know it won't! Being negative in this situation will only serve to end the match early! You can only erase a deficit and come back by maintaining a positive, never-say-die attitude. Simply put, you have to learn to systematically retrain your "inner coach" so that he/she becomes more positive and supportive. Here's how:

#1 KEEPING A NEGATIVITY LOG

Spend at least one week as an "investigative reporter." Who are you going to investigate? **YOU** and your negative "inner coach." Each night, jot down all the negative things that you said to yourself that day both at school and on the courts in practice. As you got ready for practice, what negatives did you feed yourself? As you went through your drills and/or challenge matches, what negatives were bopping around "upstairs?" When you double faulted, got broken or hit an easy put-away into the back fence, what comments did your inner coach make? If your coach or teaching pro got angry with you for something, what was the response from that inner critic? Without editing or attempting to "be positive," try to allow these typical negative thoughts

to flow. However, be sure to sit down that very night and record each and every one of these negative thoughts. You may be surprised to find that just by deliberately paying attention to how negative you are for an entire week, you'll actually begin to naturally cut down on some of this.

#2 USING A "VICTORY LOG" TO BREAK THE NEGATIVITY HABIT

After spending some time getting to really "know" your "negative inner coach," let's start to train a more positive one. Negativity is nothing more than a bad habit. For most of us it's much easier and more familiar to be negative than it is to be positive. Right NOW it's time to stop giving in to this self-destructive temptation! Starting today, I want you to keep a journal of all your small "victories." Whatever you did that day that was even a little positive should get recorded. For example, if you normally hold yourself back during wind sprints and instead you went all out, then record that. If you have a tendency to avoid working on your weaknesses and today you did some work on your backhand, then record that too. If you are inconsistent and tend to implode after a four ball rally and today, you managed to get to six balls before screwing up, then record that! If the coach said something positive to you about your effort, attitude, focus or game, then that should get in there as well. If you were working on your drop shot or lob in practice and you hit even a few decently, then record that also. As you look for these small victories, it is critical that you IGNORE that negative part of you that may be saying, "Ohhh, isn't that cute, you actually managed to hit the ball over the net six times in a row!" DON'T CENSOR THE POSITIVE! NO VICTORY IS TOO SMALL.

WHEN WILL YOU NEED YOUR "VICTORY LOG?"

You should spend time daily recording at least 10-15 little victories. If you come up with more, GREAT! Your victory log will provide you with a helpful perspective when things aren't going well. Whenever tennis players go through rough patches in their training or career, they tend to forget that they ever accomplished anything positive. It's during these tougher times that your victory log will provide you with a much needed, more positive perspective.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Use your victory log daily for at least 30 days. Turning a bad habit around and developing a new one usually takes about a month. However, my suggestion is that you get in the habit of using your victory log as a regular part of your training all season long. It will only take you a few minutes every evening to make your entries and this small investment of time will pay off huge dividends later.

#3 ELIMINATE THE “C” WORD TO BUILD CONFIDENCE

The biggest confidence drain to your competitive performance is COMPARISON. When you compare yourself to teammates or opponents right before that big match or tryout you will be setting yourself up for failure big time! When you play the “comparison game” you’ll ALWAYS lose! First of all, what others are doing is TOTALLY irrelevant to what YOU are doing. Second, comparisons ignore or discount your strengths, accomplishments and unique gifts. Third, the athlete who compares herself to a teammate or opponent is most often using the worst part of her imagination to evaluate herself. Why? Because our internal view of a teammate or opponent is usually skewed so that he/she always looks much faster, stronger or more skilled than we do. Think about YOU and YOUR training. Think about your strengths and your GAME. Forget about what your teammates or opponents are doing. In the end, they are basically irrelevant to you, your goals and how well you’ll play. To help you blow the whistle on comparisons and end this confidence killing habit, spend a week or two logging your comparison thoughts on paper. Like with the “negativity journal,” keep a record of all your comparison thoughts at matches, tryouts, practices and in school. You may be completely surprised to finally become aware of just how much comparing you’re currently doing. Remember, AWARENESS is the very first step to change. To be able to put an end to the comparison habit you want to become exquisitely aware of exactly how and how often you’re doing it.

#4 “MAKE LEMONADE”

“When life gives you lemons, make lemonade out of them!” This old adage instructs you to take the bad things that happen to you during your tennis career and “reframe” them in a more positive way. When you get in the habit of looking for the solution in the problem, sooner or later you’ll discover that you’ll get much further as an athlete and individual. Dwelling on problems will always keep you stuck in them. Reframing these same problems by looking for solutions will get you back on track and in the fast lane again. Examples of reframes: Your teammate and best friend beat you in a challenge match and now will be playing a spot ahead of you and it’s starting to make you upset. Reframe = My friend is challenging me to work harder and rededicate myself to the game. This is an opportunity to take my tennis to the next level. My opponent is cheating me on big points and I’m getting overly emotional and upset. Reframe = This is a wonderful opportunity for me to work on keeping my composure and concentration, especially to practice staying focused on what’s important and letting go of everything else. You have to play the #1 seed in a tournament and you’re feeling totally intimidated. Reframe = This is yet another opportunity to both challenge myself and

lift the level of my game because better players can teach you far more than weaker ones. You had a disappointing match where you did nothing but play defensively and push, and you're starting to get down on yourself. Reframe = You learn more from failures than you do from successes. I know I really need to work on my weakness of getting too cautious and tentative under pressure so I can relax and play my own game next time.

Exercise: Take the following problems and reframe them, and then begin practicing this mental skill on a daily basis:

You have never beaten this player before. Reframe =

Large crowd with college coaches watching. Reframe =

You have to play a notorious cheater. Reframe =

You have to play in terribly windy conditions. Reframe =

You have a chance to close out the match and you're suddenly afraid of choking. Reframe =

You didn't get enough time to properly warm up. Reframe =

A teammate who has always played behind you has now taken your spot in the line-up, pushing you back a spot. Reframe =

In training, the coach seems to be harder on you than everyone else. Reframe =

#5 TURN NEGATIVES INTO POSITIVES

Negativity is a nasty habit that will undercut your confidence and sabotage your game. It is always in your best interests as an athlete to begin to develop the much better habit of being positive. Understand that **NOTHING GOOD COMES FROM BEING NEGATIVE!** When you hear your negative self speaking up in practice or the week leading up to a tournament, don't take him/her seriously enough to listen. Instead get in the habit of substituting 4- 5 positive things. Imagine how you would end up feeling if every time you had a negative thought, it was instantly followed by 4- 5 positive ones. For example, "He's too steady for me, how can I possibly beat him" can be followed by: "He may be steady, but I've been training really well the last several months, I'm in great shape and can run all day. I'm just as steady myself! Plus I have more offensive weapons than he does." Remember, when you first try to turn negatives into positives, you can count on part of you **NOT** believing the positive messages. Understand that it is **NOT** important whether you believe these positives in the beginning. It is only important that you get in the habit of immediately replacing any and all negatives with 4-5 positive thoughts. It also doesn't matter if some of your positive thoughts are on the humorous side. For example: "I've never outplayed her before" can be followed by: "I absolutely love this game. My mental training has been going really well and she may be more of a head case than she thinks she is. And let's not forget how stylish I look in my new outfit!!!!

Exercise: At home, take 4 of your typical pre- match negative thoughts and for each negative statement, come up with 4-5 positive thoughts. Remember, you don't necessarily have to believe these positive statements in the beginning. If you keep using this strategy of turning a negative thought into multiple positive ones, within a few short weeks you'll find yourself in the habit of being positive.

#6 USING AFFIRMATIONS

Another powerful tool for systematically turning around a negative attitude and building confidence (IN BETWEEN MATCHES) is by getting in the habit of using **AFFIRMATIONS**. AN AFFIRMATION IS A POSITIVE STATEMENT THAT YOU MAKE ABOUT YOURSELF AS IF IT IS TRUE RIGHT NOW. For example, if you consistently get tired and notice that your strokes break down in those tough, three set matches, your affirmation might be, "as the match gets longer, I get stronger." If you tend to get much too nervous before your bigger matches or tournaments, your affirmation might be,

“I’m cool and calm in the clutch. The bigger the match, the better I play.” If you tend to be negative under pressure then your affirmation could be, “I stay positive NO MATTER WHAT!” If you absolutely hate your backhand your affirmation can be, “I love my backhand!” or “My backhand is the best!”

When used correctly, affirmations form powerful bridges between how you feel NOW and how you would like to feel in the FUTURE. Your affirmations should be written on index cards and posted all around your room so that you see them continuously throughout the day. Carry some in your schoolbooks. Put some in your locker. Have some in your tennis bag. Like positive statements, it is not necessary that you believe your affirmations in the beginning. It is only important that you make a point out of looking at these positive statements over and over again throughout the day.

#7 AFFIRMATIONS AND THE PRESLEEP TECHNIQUE

One effective way to get your affirmations into your unconscious and muscle memory is to use the “pre-sleep technique.” Take one particular affirmation that you’re working on at the moment, i.e. “I stay cool and calm in the clutch” and repeat it to yourself slowly as you lie in bed at night with the lights off. After the first repetition, try to imagine, in as much detail as possible, experiencing yourself doing just that, being in that third set tiebreaker and maintaining your focus and composure and playing well. Slowly repeat your affirmation a second time, once again imagining yourself staying focused and composed under these pressured situations. Continue this sequence of slowly repeating your affirmation with the accompanying imagery a total of 15 - 20 times before you fall asleep. If you find that you only get through 10 repetitions before sleep overtakes you, don’t worry. Continue this technique every night before bed.

#8 MASTERING LAST MINUTE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND SELF-DOUBTS

Far too many tennis players get knocked off balance before and during their matches by last minute negative thoughts and self-doubts. They get “emotionally hijacked” so-to-speak by these negatives, letting their fears and worries run away with their confidence, focus and, as a consequence, good play.

IT IS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND THAT YOU CAN STILL HAVE THE MATCH OF YOUR LIFE EVEN IF YOU ARE FLOODED BY LAST MINUTE DOUBTS OR NEGATIVITY! How is this possible?

First, you must understand that LAST MINUTE DOUBTS AND NEGATIVITY ARE ABSOLUTELY NORMAL. Even the very best players in this game at every level right up to the PROS sometimes entertain these thoughts right before or even during their big matches. However, they have figured out that YOU CAN STILL PLAY THE MATCH OF YOUR LIFE WITH LAST MINUTE NEGATIVES BOPPING AROUND INSIDE YOUR CRANIUM. The trick is not to allow yourself to get caught up with them. How do you do this? You must train yourself to use the negative thinking and self-doubts as neutral signals to simply RELAX AND REFOCUS ON THE TASK AT HAND. For example, if you're ready for the match's start and you hear yourself thinking, "what if I lose to this guy?" or "what if my backhand does a disappearing act?," you want to quickly and calmly shift your focus back to what you might normally be doing right before your match, i.e. stretching, warming up, etc. If you're about to serve in the first set tiebreak and you hear, "You're going to double fault, I just know it!," you want to notice the thought and quickly and calmly return your focus to your pre-serve ritual.

THIS IS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE UNDER PRESSURE!!!!

At crunch time you do NOT want to engage, debate or fight with the negative thoughts and doubts. At match time you don't even want to try to be positive! That's right! When you're waiting to return serve in a must break situation or serving at 5-5 in the third and deciding set, you don't ever want to try to turn your negative thoughts around into positives! Why? If you start thinking, "I'm being negative, I've got to be positive" then YOU ARE THINKING and, as a result, you will immediately distract yourself from the flow of the point and game. You can't play good tennis by thinking or coaching yourself through the match. You have to let the points, game and match flow and come to you. Playing like a champion is all about relaxing and trusting your instincts, strokes and game. Therefore any time your mind is throwing out negatives, you want to notice them in a relaxed manner and then immediately shift your focus to what is happening on the court at that moment!

Here's a metaphor for dealing with any assault by negative thinking and self-doubts. When these last minute negatives begin to "attack" you, you want to respond as if you were an Aikido master. Aikido is a "soft" martial art where the practitioner meets an assault by utilizing the attacker's own force and momentum to effortlessly neutralize him. The fighter skilled in Aikido may, for example, quickly slip to one side, grab his attacker's wrist and twist it in just such a way as to completely and immediately render his assailant powerless. Rather than letting yourself get caught up in fighting with your own negativity, you want to effortlessly side step those thoughts by REFOCUSING ON THE TASK AT HAND. If the negatives persist, then again, refocus without emotionally engaging them.



Let me give you a specific example of exactly what I'm talking about by not engaging your negative thinking while you're in the middle of a match:

Let's say that I'm about to serve a crucial game in the match and as I begin my service motion, I hear a little voice in my head, my front brain or conscious mind saying, "You're gonna double fault! You're gonna double fault!" Now I have three options here, the first two demonstrate what you don't want to do, engaging the negative thinking by fighting it with more positive thoughts. The third option demonstrates what I mean by using the thinking as a neutral signal to relax and refocus.

Engaging thinking #1 – I stop my motion and start talking to myself. "No, I won't double fault. I've been working hard all month on my serve and I have a good one. I'm going to hit it hard, get it in and that's that!" By fighting with my inner negative chatter in this way, I end up tightening my body up and muscling the serve, over-hitting it and driving it long.

Engaging thinking #2 – I stop my motion and respond to my negative thoughts with a scared, “I better make sure I don’t double fault! This is a big game and I really need to just get it in!” This response leaves me nervous and physically tight and as a result, I take a lot off my serve and just bloop it in.

Using negative thinking as a neutral signal to relax and refocus – I hear the thoughts, stop my motion and step back from the baseline. I then refocus my concentration on my breathing. I step back to the line and put my concentration on my pre-serve ritual of setting my feet, taking a slow deep breath and then bouncing the ball 4 times. As I do, I begin to put my focus on the feel of both of my arms swinging relaxed and freely, exactly how they are when I serve well. As I do this, my concentration narrows to the sight of the ball as it leaves my hand on the toss.

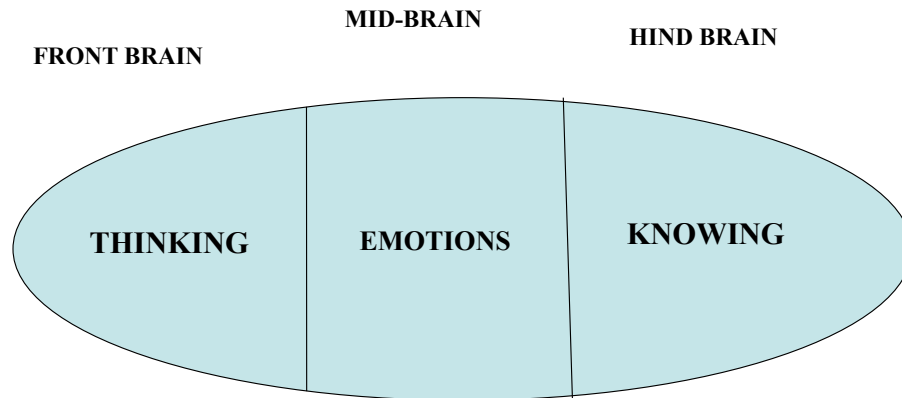
#9 USE HUMOR

Another strategy you might try (only use before or when there are long breaks in the action. For example, the days leading up to a tournament, the night before or a few hours before a match) is to greet your typical negative thoughts and doubts with humor. For example, right before that all important tryout you hear, “you’re going to blow it, I can just feel it! You’re going to choke in the challenge match.” Instead of engaging those thoughts by thinking, “NO I’M NOT!” or “Stop thinking that! That’s being negative. I have to be positive!” you might quickly think “Gee, that was really helpful! Thanks so much for sharing” or “A thought for you my little friend. I’m just about to play in this match. Perhaps you may want to get yourself some water and a snack, and I’ll chat with you when I’m done!” When you use humor on yourself in response to these last minute negatives, you neutralize the emotional reaction so common to them and therefore you end up staying calm and relaxed, both of which are absolutely critical to your playing your best when it counts the most.

YOUR BRAIN AND PEAK PERFORMANCE

While we’re on this topic of thinking, it is absolutely critical that you as an athlete understand that one of the main differences between playing your best and choking your guts out lies in the part of the brain that you’re in as you perform. That is, when you’re at your best, in the “zone,” you are functioning from your HIND BRAIN and when you struggle, performance-wise, you’re stuck in your FRONT BRAIN. Let me explain:

HUMAN BRAIN



As you can see in this side view depicting the human brain, it's broken into three parts: The **FRONT BRAIN**; **MID-BRAIN**; and **HIND BRAIN**. Each part of your brain controls different functioning in your life, on and off the court. The **FRONT BRAIN'S** job is **THINKING**. If you are thinking about how good your opponent is before the match, telling yourself what you just did wrong and what you need to do to correct your mistake (i.e. "your swing is late...you're letting the ball get too close to you, you need to be moving your feet more so you can get in better position,"), thinking about how you need to make sure you get this serve in and win this game, otherwise you're opponent will probably win the match, then you are in your **FRONT BRAIN** because our front brain controls thinking.

The **MID-BRAIN** controls **EMOTIONS** and the **HIND BRAIN** controls **KNOWING**. The "knowing" that I'm talking about here isn't IQ or intellectual knowledge. It's the knowing that comes from doing, that comes from experience. For example, you know how to walk, talk, ride a bike, etc. All of the things that you have been doing over and over again for a long time get turned over to the control of your Hind Brain.

To understand the difference between when you play well and when you struggle, between your best and worst matches, we're going to briefly look at how your **FRONT BRAIN** and **HIND BRAIN** work or "process" information. We will leave the **MID-BRAIN** out of this discussion.

<u>FRONT BRAIN</u>	<u>HIND BRAIN</u>
<i>conscious</i>	<i>unconscious</i>
<i>uses words/sentences</i>	<i>images & muscle memory</i>
<i>analytical</i>	<i>coordinates the whole</i>
<i>judgmental</i>	<i>non-judgmental</i>
<i>extremely slow</i>	<i>instantaneous</i>

The above table depicts the processing differences between your FRONT and HIND brains. Let me explain this in understandable English. When you are in your FRONT BRAIN and THINKING, this part of your brain processes things CONSCIOUSLY. All this means is that when you are in your Front Brain, you are AWARE of the processing because you can hear yourself thinking. For example, after you blow a forty-love lead and then lose the game you can hear yourself thinking, “God! How could you have done that! Why didn’t you just relax and hit out when you had that passing shot? You should never have lost that game!”

Front Brain processing USES WORDS AND SENTENCES. We think in words and sentences, one sentence after another in a linear fashion. This is the language of your Front Brain. Front Brain processing is ANALYTICAL. That is, your front brain tends to break things down into component pieces. It would be like having a teaching pro instructing you as you get ready to return serve. “OK, now keep yourself bouncing on the balls of your feet. Make sure your backswing is short. You also have to time the ball so you’re hitting it out in front. Shorten your follow-through on his first serve. Keep your wrist firm and be sure to drop your racquet head under the ball. Try to keep your eyes on the ball and pick it up early off of his racquet head. Remember, if he comes to the net, you have to keep your return low and at his feet.” etc. etc. Front Brain processing is like having a 100 piece puzzle in front of you but you only focus on one piece at a time, separate from the whole picture.

Front Brain processing is JUDGMENTAL. That is, your Front Brain is a critic who is continually evaluating you. i.e. “That was a great shot!” “That forehand completely sucked!” “How could you have missed that?!” “I can’t believe you are playing so badly!” “You don’t even belong in the singles line-up!” etc.

Because your Front Brain processes this way, consciously, using words and sentences, and breaking things down into their component pieces, Front Brain processing is **WICKED SLOW!!!!** That is, you can only process as fast as you can think, one sentence after another. Imagine trying to return someone's first serve and trying to coach yourself through all the technical things that you must do in order to hit a good serve return! You wouldn't get two words in the first instructional sentence out before the ball was already on top of you!

Now let's look at how your Hind Brain works. **HIND BRAIN** processing goes on **UNCONSCIOUSLY**. That is, when you're in your Hind Brain you are **NOT AWARE** of it. When you walk down the street you don't think about your walking technique or whether you're lifting your knees high enough! When you hit a reflex volley off an opponent's attempted passing shot, you don't think about how to volley or even where to put the ball. You just react and your reaction is totally outside of your conscious awareness.

Hind Brain processing uses **IMAGES AND MUSCLE MEMORY**. The language of your Hind Brain consists of pictures and body feel. Muscle memory is what you develop as an athlete from hours upon hours of practicing the same skills and movements over and over again. Hind Brain processing is the opposite of analytical. Instead of breaking things down into their component pieces, your Hind Brain takes all the pieces and **COORDINATES THEM INTO A WHOLE**. Everything that goes into running crosscourt at full speed to track down an angle shot and return it with a sharp angle, cross-court top-spin ball, the timing, coordination, foot speed, racquet control, racquet speed, touch, etc. get handled by your Hind Brain. It's my 100 piece puzzle, only this time your eyes are drawn to the finished picture and not the individual pieces.

Hind Brain Processing is **NON-JUDGMENTAL**. You either do something or not, without any evaluation or criticism. Because your Hind Brain processes this way, unconsciously using images and muscle memory and coordinating things into a whole, Hind Brain processing is **INSTANTANEOUS**. Your Hind Brain has the ability to process unbelievably complex information in a split second!

Based upon what we're saying here, which part of your brain do you want "holding" the racquet and running the show when you walk on the court for a match? That's right, the Hind Brain. Your Hind Brain plays tennis like a pro! He/she is quick, smooth, loose and talented. Your Hind Brain is where all of your tennis skills lie. Your Front Brain, on the other hand is a hopeless hacker! Your Hind Brain is far too slow and inept to keep up with the complexity and speed of this game.

So if you go out onto the court for a match and you try to think your way through it, try to coach yourself or continually evaluate or criticize your play, then you are allowing the hacker to take over! The time to think is NEVER DURING A MATCH!!! NEVER! Thinking takes too much time and distracts you from focusing on the moment by moment play of the competition.

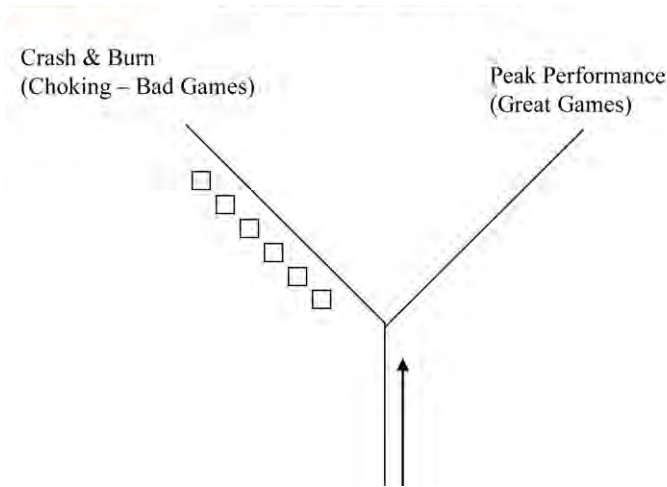
This is not to say that you never want to use your Front Brain. There are times that you want to evaluate your strokes and play. There are times you want to break down your game into pieces and analyze what works and what doesn't. However, you don't EVER want to do this while you are competing. Instead, you should save the analysis for practice, after the match or tournament is over. In addition, it's fine and even necessary to be in your Front Brain when you are learning new technique, skills or strategies. Remember, your Hind Brain takes over things that you already know. When you first learn new things, you don't know. Therefore you must go through your Front Brain first in the learning process before your Hind Brain can take over.

This is why it is absolutely critical that when you play, you keep your focus on what you're doing in the moment and not on thinking your way through the match. This is why you don't want to engage or argue with negative thinking or last minute self-doubts. Instead, notice that they're there and quickly allow your focus to go back to the match and what is going on in the moment. In the next chapter we will talk more specifically about exactly how to do this!

#10 - KNOW THE "SIGNS" - THE ROAD TO CRASH & BURN

Imagine that you are driving down "X," a road mapped out in figure #5. You are in a hurry and don't know the area. Suddenly several hundred yards ahead you see a fork in the road. You desperately look for a place to stop for directions because you have absolutely no clue which fork you should take. Unfortunately, there are no signs of intelligent life anywhere so you pull over to the side of the road, stop the car and get out. You start walking towards the fork and that's when you see it. At first you're a little embarrassed that you missed it, because there, right by the left fork is a sign that says, "Dead End." You chuckle to yourself as you get back in the car, turn on the ignition, put it in drive and step on the gas. When you get to the intersection you turn the wheel sharply to the left and go down the wrong road. A little further down the road there's another sign that says, "Road ends, 2 miles." You smile to yourself and step on the gas. Soon you come to another sign that says, "Warning, road ends 1 mile." You continue to accelerate the car. Shortly after you approach another sign that reads, "Road ends, ½ mile NO Outlet." You continue to accelerate. Then you pass a sign that says,

“Danger. Road ends 1300 feet, 5000 foot drop.” You think to yourself, “cool, I’ve never been over a 5000 foot cliff before in a car” and you continue to accelerate.



Both you and I know that no one on his/her right mind would go down this road the way I’ve just described. However, there are two good reasons why someone who was actually sane would do this: #1 THEY DIDN’T SEE THE SIGNS! #2 THEY SAW THE SIGNS AND CHOSE TO IGNORE THEM.

What’s this example have to do with you and playing well at crunch time? PLENTY! There are numerous personal “signs” as you approach a tournament and match which let you know that you’re going down the wrong road. If you miss them or chose to ignore them, then you will consistently end up playing poorly. What are these signs? They represent the typical, unhelpful things that you tend to say to yourself or think as the match or tryout approaches, or as the competition progresses. The more you engage and entertain these thoughts, the further down that road you’ll get and the more difficult it will be for you to turn yourself around and go down the right road.

For example, let’s say the very first sign that I’m heading down the wrong road is when I start thinking about my opponent before the match: “I’ve never beaten him/her before.” This thought may then be followed by, “What if I choke like I did last match.” My next thought might be, “I’m feeling really off today and my forehand feels like crap!” followed by “How can I possibly win if I can’t hit my forehand?” As I let each of these thoughts lead, uninterrupted into the next one, my confidence continues to drop and my level of nervousness rises. Or let’s say that during the match, I make several unforced errors in a row or double fault a few times. My very first response to that, my first sign might be, “You totally suck! You should’ve made those shots/gotten your serve in.” If I let those go uninterrupted, it may be followed by, “You always seem

to choke under pressure.” The next thought/sign might be, “If you don’t start winning points fast, you’re going to lose and then get moved down to #5 singles.” The further I let myself get “down the road” into these thoughts, the more trouble I’m going to get into performance-wise. As an athlete you must train yourself to recognize the very first sign that you’re heading down the wrong road so that you can quickly “turn the car around” and head down the right road. Spend some time with the following exercise:

Exercise: Reading your “signs” to ‘crash & burn’ – Choose two or more past match situations where you got too nervous either pre- or during match to perform to your potential. Think back to the very first sign (self-talk) that let you know you were heading down the wrong road. You may have been at home, the night before the match, in the car driving to the courts, or warming up. Now think back to the very next negative thought (second sign) that followed. Where did this thought lead? (third sign). Write down in sequence each of these thoughts leading right up to the match’s start and including your thoughts during the match. Remember, if you can easily recognize the typical signs that indicate you’re going down the wrong road, then you are in a position to be able to turn things around. If you can’t recognize your habitually negative pre- and during match self-talk, then you will be doomed to “go over the cliff” and play badly, even before the match starts.

THE WISE TENNIS PLAYER SAYETH: “The problem is NOT the problem. The real problem is how you REACT to the problem.”

It is critically important for you to keep an understanding of this little saying in the back of your mind. Far too many tennis players get knocked off track by things that happen in the match: your opponent makes a terrible call, the wind suddenly kicks up, someone watching becomes verbally distracting, you dominate a crucial point and your opponent mishits the ball for a winner, you get broken, you blow three break points in a row, the ball takes a bad bounce causing you to lose a crucial point, etc. Save your energy and keep your head on straight! In so many things in tennis as well as in life, the problem that has just happened and seems to be causing you so much heartache and aggravation is NOT the real problem. The REAL problem is always how YOU DECIDE TO REACT to this problem. It’s always your reaction that gets you into hot water far more than the event itself that occurred.



STEP FIVE



DEVELOPING AWARENESS OF YOUR FOCUS OF CONCENTRATION

Concentration is the most central and important mental skill in mental toughness. If you always seem to get too nervous before your tournaments/matches or consistently practice far better than when you compete, if you have a terrible time letting go of unforced errors or opponent's bad calls, if you get easily intimidated or psyched out by certain players, then chances are quite good that your pre-match and during match concentration is way off. By learning to control your focus of concentration, you will better handle competitive pressure, avoid psych-outs and intimidation, quickly rebound from mistakes and bad breaks, keep your self-confidence at a high level and more consistently play your best when it counts the most. Understand that one of the main differences between your best and worst matches is where you put your focus of concentration.

DISCOVERING THE CONCENTRATION DIFFERENCES BETWEEN YOUR BEST & WORST PERFORMANCES

Exercise: Recall in detail a great match. Where and when were you playing? What surface were you playing on? Who were you competing against? How big was the crowd? Were you playing indoors or outdoors, and, if the latter, what kind of a day was it? What, if anything was at stake? Now try to remember your focus of concentration on the day of the match. Where was your focus during warm-up? Where you focusing on yourself and what you were doing or was your concentration locked on the match and your opponent? What did you focus on during the coach's pre-match comments? In the opening game? During the first set? After an unforced error or double fault? After winning a long rally or making a spectacular shot? If and when you got tired? Record your answers on Worksheet #3, Concentration & Good Performances. Now answer the very same questions for at least two more great matches. After reviewing your concentration for three or more of your better performances you will begin to get a good idea of where YOU need to focus in order for you to do your best.

Next, pick a particularly bad performance from your past, a time when you felt that you really stunk the place out. In as much detail as possible, recall what you were focusing on the day of that match. Where was your focus during warm up? What did you concentrate on in the first game? If you got broken, where did your concentration go? Where was your focus on change-overs and in between sets? If you had a number of break points or you were up in the set, where did your focus go? What did you focus on when things got tough in the match? Use Worksheet #4 Concentration & Bad Performances to record your answers. Take two or three more disappointing performances and answer the very same questions for each one. After reviewing your concentration for each of these bad matches you should begin to develop a pretty good idea of what you shouldn't be focusing on both before and during your matches.

DO YOU PLAY BETTER IN PRACTICE THAN YOU DO IN COMPETITION?

If you are like a lot of tennis players I've worked with over the years, then you'd answer with a resounding and frustrating YES to this question! "I play great in practice. I'm loose, relaxed and hit aggressively, using heavy topspin and going for my shots. I'm not afraid to attack and hit my volleys with authority," you complain..."so how come my game does a disappearing act when it counts, how come I seem to start pushing the ball and slicing everything when I'm under pressure?" You can easily come up with the solutions to these puzzling questions by doing a similar concentration exercise.

Exercise: Take a moment to examine your concentration in practice as compared to more pressured, match situations using Worksheet #5 Concentration in Practice vs. Matches. What do you concentrate on in practice? When your partner hits you a shallow ball, where do you put your focus of concentration? When you make an unforced error in practice, what happens to your focus? How is that concentration different from your match focus? There is no mystery why a talented player will do better in practice than she will under pressure. It is directly related to having a different focus of concentration in both of those situations. The first step in developing the concentration of a winner is to become aware of these differences. Examine your worksheets to see if you can begin to discover the concentration differences between practice and performance.

WHAT IS CONCENTRATION?

THE ABILITY TO FOCUS ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT & LET GO OF EVERYTHING ELSE

Remember that when you play badly, it's never a question of you not concentrating! You are always concentrating both before and during your matches. The more important question is, "WHAT ARE YOU CONCENTRATING ON?" If you focus on the wrong things either before or during your matches, then you will always play tightly and tentatively and way below your capabilities. At match time there are many, many things that can distract you from having a proper focus: Your opponent; How you feel that day; The size of the crowd and who's in it; What's going on in school and your personal life; The court conditions; The weather; Your teammates and how they might be playing; Your coach's yelling and comments both before and during the match; How big this match is; and the list goes on and on! It is your job to KNOW exactly what is important for you to focus on and what you should be letting go of. Here's an exercise to really help you develop a working understanding of this all important principle: FOCUS ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT AND LET GO OF EVERYTHING ELSE.

CATCHING MARKERS

Exercise: Take 10 different colored magic markers and try the following "concentration test." Your task is to throw all 10 markers up at the same time, relatively high above your head and to then try to catch as many as possible. It's important to use only your hands when you catch them and not to trap them against your body. Now, throw all 10 up at the same time. If you do this correctly without cheating, then like most people

I do this with, you probably only caught 0, 1 or 2 markers. If this is the case, does it really mean that you can't concentrate? ABSOLUTELY NOT! This is an impossible task because there are too many things to focus on all at once. The fact of the matter is:

YOU CAN ONLY CONCENTRATE ON ONE THING WELL AT A TIME

While you can certainly focus on a ton of things at once, when it comes down to peak performance, you can only concentrate on one thing well at a time. If this is true, then you better make darn sure that the one thing you are concentrating really well on is WHAT'S IMPORTANT!

Now, pick one special marker in your group of 10 to focus on. For example, let's say the red one. Take that marker, stick it in the middle of the other 9 and throw all 10 up once again at the same time. Remember, your job is to only catch that one red marker. What happens? If you have relatively decent hand-eye coordination, then you effortlessly catch the red one. The point? It's very easy to focus on what's important when you know exactly what that is ahead of time.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO FOCUS ON BEFORE AND DURING YOUR MATCHES? USING FOCAL POINTS

As we've already discussed, where you put your concentration before and during your matches determines whether you'll gobble with the turkeys or soar with the eagles. Where you put your focus of concentration is called a FOCAL POINT. Focal points can be KINESTHETIC or something that you FEEL. They can be VISUAL or something that you LOOK at. They can be AUDITORY or something that you LISTEN to. Focal points help you CONTROL YOUR EYES AND EARS. That is, they provide you with a predetermined place for you to put your concentration that will help distract you from anything negative or distracting. Controlling your eyes means that you only focus on those things, before and during the match that keep you calm, confident and ready to play your best.

In tennis, your main and only focal point during the action is pretty obvious, it's that small round, yellow ball that's continually moving! It's in between points when you have a ton of time to think, that you really want to work on controlling your eyes and ears by using focal points.

For example, if focusing on the size, ranking and/or strokes of your opponent during your warm-up gets you too nervous, you'd control your eyes by keeping them away from thinking about these things while you're hitting and on the ball (a visual focal point) as well as on the feel of your own strokes as you warm them up, a kinesthetic

focal point. Controlling your ears similarly means that before and during the match, you only want to listen to those things that keep you calm, confident and loose. For example, if someone is trying to tell you how unbelievably great your opponent is before your match and all the amazing people this kid has beaten, and this is getting you nervous, then you'd control your ears by either turning up the volume on your ipod or finding someone else to chat with about something that has absolutely nothing to do with tennis!

Examples of KINSETHETIC focal points are: The feeling of your stretch as you loosen up before the match; the feeling of your breath going in and out while you're stretching; The feeling of the ball in your hand; the feel of your strings as you straighten them out in the racquet; the feel of the sun on your face, etc. Keep in mind that for tennis players, your most important during match focal point is visual, the ball. Visual, KIN-ESTHETIC and audio focal points are equally as useful in between points and games.

Exercise: List 4 Kinesthetic (K) or feeling focal points that you can use pre-match.

K- Focal points: Pre-match

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

Examples of VISUAL (V) focal points are: Looking at your racket/strings before/during your match; Looking down at the lines in between points; Looking at a friend while you talk to him/her prior to your match; Defocusing your eyes and "spacing out" as you look out over the court before the match starts; Looking down a tree/object outside but near the tennis courts;

Exercise: List 4 Visual focal points that you can concentrate on before your matches.
List 4 Visual focal points you could use during your match.

V – FOCAL POINTS: PRE-MATCH

1)

2)

3)

4)

V- FOCAL POINTS: DURING MATCH
(IN BETWEEN POINTS, GAMES AND DURING THE CHANGEOVERS)

1)

2)

3)

4)

Examples of AUDITORY (A) focal points are: Listening to music; Getting involved in a conversation with your coach or teammates; Listening to the sound of your breathing; repeating a positive word or phrase to yourself over and over again; Listening to the sound of the ball bouncing on the court; Singing to yourself.

Exercise: List 4 Auditory focal points that you can use pre-match. List 4 Auditory focal points that you can use during your match.

A – FOCAL POINTS: PRE-MATCH

1)

2)

3)

4)

A – FOCAL POINTS: DURING MATCH
(IN BETWEEN POINTS, GAMES AND DURING CHANGEOVERS)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

IMPORTANT NOTE: It is NOT necessary for you to have more than one or two focal points either before or during your matches. It is also NOT necessary for you to have all three kinds of focal points. What is important here is that you develop familiar concentration targets where you can consistently put your focus both before and during your performances.

DURING MATCH FOCUSING – USING RITUALS

As we're discussing, it is critical that you maintain control of your eyes and ears throughout the course of your match. When you allow your concentration to drift to the wrong things, you risk losing your confidence and tightening up. As a tennis player, you are always more vulnerable to losing your focus during the time in between points. It's relatively easy for most athletes to focus during the point because you know your focus needs to stay on that round, yellow thing. However, after one point is over and before the next one has started, there is plenty of time and room to get distracted by either things going on around you or what's happening inside your head.

It's during the times when you have "free" time to think, that you really need to maintain control of your concentration. The main way that you can insure that your focus stays in the right place before you serve, return or in between points is by developing set pre-performance rituals. A pre-performance ritual is comprised of the those little things that you either think about, look at and/or do right before you serve, return serve or in between points or games.

Your pre-performance ritual is important for two reasons: First, it's FAMILIAR. It's something you always do. Therefore it's calming and comforting because no matter who you're playing or how many people are watching, the one thing that always stays the same is your ritual. In this way your ritual is like a SAFE PORT IN A STORM. You can be getting ready to serve at 5-5 in the match-deciding tie-breaker, but the one thing that you can rely on to calm you down in this situation is your familiar, pre-serve ritual. When something is familiar in that way it "binds" your anxiety;

The second critical reason for using rituals is that THEY GIVE YOU SOMETHING SPECIFIC TO FOCUS ON THAT HELPS DISTRACT YOU FROM ALL OF THE DISTRACTIONS! Rituals provide you with a safe place to put your focus. Because you can't simply say to yourself, "Don't think about that!" or "Don't focus on that!," (because when you do, you end up doing exactly what you don't want to!), your ritual gives you something else to think about/focus on which distracts you from those upsetting thoughts or visuals.

In every sport, you will always find the very best athletes using pre-performance rituals to center and calm themselves down before taking a crucial free throw, pitching a baseball or softball, getting ready to swing up at the plate, taking a PK in soccer, before a golf stroke, etc.

Your ritual doesn't have to be complicated. It can be very simple like a pre-serve ritual where you look down at the baseline as you line your feet up, bounce the ball three times, take a slow deep breath, pick a spot where you want to serve and then begin your service motion. You can have an in between point ritual where you look down at the lines as you move to the other side of the court, look at your strings as you move them around, take a slow, deep breath and then get ready to begin your serve or return of serve ritual to start the next point.

A pre-performance ritual helps you systematically narrow your focus so that by the time the next point begins, you have a one-point, ball only focus. So be sure to take some time in practice to develop these little, familiar personal behaviors. They'll go a long way in helping you maintain your composure under pressure!



DEVELOPING CHAMPIONSHIP CONCENTRATION

Do you know how to concentrate? This very simple skill is the heart of mental toughness and the secret to you consistently playing the kind of tennis that you're physically capable of. Want to learn to quickly bounce back from unforced errors, blown opportunities or bad breaks? Want to be at your best when the heat of competition is turned way up high? Then you have to learn to concentrate like a champion. To effectively build your concentration muscles, you must begin to practice two mini-skills. First, you must recognize that your focus of concentration has veered away from what is important. Second, you must discipline yourself to quickly and gently bring your focus back to the proper target. Mastering this "recognize and return" skill will help turn you into a mentally tough player.

What is critical for you to understand as an athlete is that breaks in your concentration will NOT hurt you. Everyone loses their focus now and again. Sometimes, in fact, you may be having the kind of day where you lose your focus a ton! Even during those scattered times, when your concentration is all over the place, you can still play championship tennis. The key here is that you recognize that you've lost your focus and immediately bring it back. Remember, it's not the break in concentration that hurts you. It's the break in concentration that you don't catch, so you end up

playing several points, a game or two or even a whole set without bringing your focus back to what's important.

NUMBERS WITH DISTRACTIONS

Exercise: Sit quietly with your eyes closed, feet flat on the floor. Put your focus of concentration on your breathing. When you inhale, focus on the feeling in your lower belly of the air coming in. When you exhale and feel the air going out, focus on the number 1. You can "see" a number one in your mind's eye. You can repeat "one" in your head, or you can do a combination. Inhale, feel the breath. Exhale focus on the number. Since this is a boring exercise you'll find your mind beginning to wander. When you do drift: Quickly recognize that you've lost the proper focus. Return your concentration to your breathing and the feeling of the air coming in. As you exhale focus on the number 2. You can see the #2 in your mind's eye, repeat the sound "two" in your head, or do a combination. Inhale focus on the breath, exhale focus on the number. Each time you lose your focus and drift, add a number. Do this exercise for 3 minutes without any distractions and then turn a radio or CD player on and try the same exercise for an additional minute or two.

DEVELOPING A CONCENTRATION CUE

Exercise: Take a tennis ball and sit 3-4 feet away from it. Pick a specific spot on the ball to gently rest your eyes. Your eyes will stay on this spot the entire exercise. Shift your focus to your breathing and when you inhale, feel your lower belly rise. As you exhale and feel your diaphragm deflate, repeat a word to yourself. The word will become your "concentration cue" or concentration signal/reminder. You can use words like "ball," "focus," "power," "strong," "now," etc. Whenever your focus drifts from your visual target, breathing or word, quickly and gently return your focus. Do this exercise for 3 minutes without any distractions. Then take the ball and put it on top of a TV set. Sit far enough back so that in order for you to still see your spot, you must also see the entire screen. Turn the TV on but on very low volume at first. Try to stay focused on your spot for the next minute without getting distracted by the images on the TV screen. When you do get distracted, quickly return your focus to your spot and concentration cue.

Note: Sufficient practice of this exercise will develop and fine-tune your concentration abilities. Soon you will be able to quickly refocus yourself just by quietly repeating

your concentration cue to yourself either pre-match or even during the match. Understand that this very simple exercise is absolutely critical in helping you strengthen your concentration muscles. If you're the kind of player who tends to hang onto mistakes, who easily gets psyched out or intimidated or who has trouble staying calm under pressure, then I strongly recommend that you work with this exercise regularly.

STEP SIX



PLAY YOUR OWN GAME/ FOCUS ON YOU FOR GREAT MATCHES

One of the more common concentration mistakes made by tennis players at every level is to get too caught up with the competition. When you focus too much on your opponent before or during your matches, you undermine your confidence, make yourself nervous and stop focusing on the things that help you play your best when it counts the most. As a result, you'll always find your reaction time slower, your strokes more tentative and that you're always a step or two behind. Thinking about how big, strong, fast or talented your opponent may be is probably the best way that I know of to **TOTALLY FREAK YOURSELF OUT!!!** In fact, allowing your focus of concentration to drift too much to your opponent either before or during your match is the best strategy there is to intimidate or psych yourself out. Instead, you have to train yourself to **STAY INSIDE YOURSELF AND PLAY YOUR OWN GAME!**

What does this actually mean?

It means simply to focus on **YOU**, to not get caught up in comparing yourself with the competition, to not get distracted by comparing yourself with your teammates. It also means that you **DON'T** want to spend time, pre-tournament going on-line and "studying" the rankings and wins/losses of your potential opponents. Tennis players who spend the days leading up to a tournament doing this are unknowingly inflating the skill and prowess of their opponents while simultaneously undermining their own confidence.

There's a cardinal rule in tennis as in most other sports. **YOU WANT TO PLAY YOUR OWN GAME!** If the strength in your game is to stay in the backcourt and get everything back, then this is what you want to do. If you play your best when you're aggressive and attack the net at every opportunity, then this is how you want to play. The problem with over-focusing on your opponent and his/her imagined strengths is that you will get thrown off of playing your game. When this happens, you are toast! This is one of the other reasons that you don't want to engage in thinking about or comparing yourself to the competition.

COMPARISON is a dirty word in sports. When you get caught up in comparing yourself you will almost always come out on the short end of the stick. Why? Because comparison is something that we do in our head, using our imagination. Most of the time your imagination will give you a negatively distorted picture of your skills and ability in relation to others. If you really want to outplay a particular individual, what this means is that you have to focus even more on yourself and your game, **NOT** on them! This is an important contradiction that most players and coaches don't fully understand. To outplay the competition you must focus on **YOU**, **NOT** on **THEM**! If you get too caught up with how good you think that they are or what you think they can do, then you'll tend to get yourself too uptight to play your best. As a result you'll go out there and either try too hard, over-hitting and going for too much, or you'll be so intimidated by your opponent that you'll start pushing and play tentatively.

The wise doubles player sayeth:

REMEMBER, THE MORE YOU CONCENTRATE ON BEATING ANOTHER OPPONENT, THE LESS CHANCE THAT YOU WILL! THE LESS YOU FOCUS ON BEATING AN OPPONENT AND THE MORE YOU FOCUS ON YOU AND PLAYING YOUR OWN GAME, THE MORE CHANCE THERE IS THAT YOU WILL BEAT THEM!

Understand this:

EVERY MOMENT DURING A MATCH WHERE YOU ARE FOCUSING ON THE OPPONENT AND HOW GOOD YOU THINK HE/SHE IS, IS A MOMENT WHERE YOU'RE HANDICAPPING YOURSELF, A MOMENT WHEN YOU WILL PLAY BELOW YOUR ABILITY!

If you spend time worrying about an opponent, then you are robbing yourself of your speed, confidence and strengths! How good your opponent is on paper, his/her ranking and "wins," the kind of buildup your coach or others may have given him, etc. are all totally irrelevant to whether you'll play the way you're capable of. You want your energy and focus on **YOU**, on your game and style of play, not on **THEM**! Yes, it's oc-

casionally useful to have some scouting info on your opponent and his/her tendencies. However, getting too caught up in that information will most often psych you out. Stay inside yourself. Focus on YOU! PLAY YOUR OWN GAME!!!!

Exercise: Practice focusing on YOU in practice. During drills and practices be alert to whenever your focus of concentration drifts to a teammate, the coach, someone playing on the next court or someone behind the fence watching. Immediately catch yourself and return your focus to what YOU are doing at the moment. If you find that you are focusing on another player and comparing yourself, quickly interrupt this focus and bring yourself back to YOU. Try to get in the habit of immediately catching yourself the instant you drift away from YOU and then quickly coming back. The more that you work on this in practice, the easier it will be for you to stay inside yourself in pressured situations.



STEP SEVEN



STAY IN THE “NOW” FOR PEAK PERFORMANCE

Another common and costly concentration mistake made by many athletes at the big tournament or during a crucial point in a match is what I call “MENTAL TIME TRAVELING.” What “time traveling” involves is mentally leaving the present, or the NOW and either going back into the PAST or jumping ahead into the FUTURE. For example, if you had a bad warm-up and you’re still thinking about that as the match begins, then you are mentally in the past. If you miss an easy put-away or over-head up at the net or double fault a game away and you can’t seem to stop thinking about these, then you are again in the past. Similarly, if you go into a match thinking about the last time that you lost to this opponent, then you’re mentally in the past. As far as tennis players go, hanging out in the PAST is a universal mental mistake and one that will distract you from the task at hand and kill your confidence. To play your best you have to learn to immediately let your unforced errors and mistakes go. Carrying your screw-ups around with you during a match will NOT help you correct them. On the contrary! Hanging onto your missed shots will generate a ton more of them! Keep in mind that the time for you to work on your mistakes is IN PRACTICE after the match and NEVER during the match!

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO QUICKLY LET YOUR MISTAKES GO?

First of all you have to get good at recognizing that your focus of concentration has gotten stuck in the PAST. One way to do this is to know what the “language” is of the past. There are certain words and phrases that your “inner coach” uses that are clues to your being in the past. For example, tennis players who tend to mentally hang out

in the past, use language like: “Here we go again;” “I knew this was going to happen;” “I always choke under pressure;” or “Whenever I lose the first set, I tend to lose the match;” “I can’t seem to win tie-breakers!;” “I can never beat him/her;” or “I should’ve done this” or “I shouldn’t have done that!” All of these phrases let you know that your focus is in the past.

Understand that having a past focus isn’t always bad. There are times that you can temporarily go back into the past and it can be both positive and constructive. For example, let’s say that you’ve just lost the first set and are down two breaks and 4 games to 1 in the second. You can think of other matches in the past where you were similarly down and were able to come back and win. This kind of time traveling isn’t destructive as long as when you step back out onto the court, your focus is back in the match in the NOW.

LETTING GO OF MISTAKES

MISTAKE RITUALS: As a tennis player, it is absolutely critical that you keep your focus of concentration in the NOW of your match. Dwelling on the past and unforced errors, blown break opportunities or double faults will always distract you from the important task at hand and make you too uptight to play to your potential. It’s imperative that you learn to not clutter your present focus with past mistakes and missed shots. To help you quickly let go of these and bring your focus back into the NOW of your match, you want to develop a “mistake ritual.” What’s a mistake ritual? It’s a series of small steps that you go through mentally and physically in between points and/or games as well as during the changeovers which will help you return your focus to the NOW of the match.

Typically after a mistake, an athlete will do three things that keep the mistake in the forefront of his/her mind. First, he/she will tend to allow his focus to remain on the bad shot or double fault. Second, he/she will engage in negative self-talk, angrily putting themselves down for screwing up. Third, and as a result of the first two, the athlete’s anxiety level and muscle tension will rise. If you don’t immediately interrupt this process, if you allow yourself to stay distracted, upset and physically tight, then the one thing that you can surely count on is that more bad shots will soon follow. You can effectively counteract these negative effects from a poor performance by developing and practicing a “mistake ritual.” Here’s an example:

Let’s say that you just blew a 40 – love lead by double faulting twice and missing an easy put-away that would’ve given you the first set and you’re upset with yourself. You

keep thinking about how loosely you played that game and you're upset that you blew an easy chance to close out the first set. Your inner coach is going to town with, "God, you totally choked! How could you have missed that volley?!!! I can't believe you blew the set!" etc.

Now, before you let yourself get totally out of control, you use the following mistake ritual: You walk over to the back fence and pick up a ball. You then focus your concentration on the ball, instead of how you let the set get away from you. You keep your eyes on the ball, feel its texture and temperature, etc. As you do that, you begin to change your negative self-talk. "Let it go. You'll get it back. Leave it in the past. Stay calm and loose. Stay in the NOW!" At the same time that you are countering the negativity, you deliberately begin to slow and deepen your breathing, making sure that your focus goes completely to the physical sensations of a relaxed inhale and exhale. You do this to physically calm yourself down. When an athlete is uptight and emotions are running in the red zone, getting back in control of your breathing is one of the fastest and best ways to get your head back in the match.

Now this ritual sounds like it may take several minutes to pull off. In actuality, it's only a few seconds and it takes place in between games or even points. When you feel sufficiently calmer, you then take the ball that you've been holding in your fist and "let it go," "throwing it away!" You are symbolically letting go of your bad shots/upsets so that you can get your focus back into the present point and the NOW.

As a tennis player, you can take any piece from this ritual that you'd like. You can add new ones of your own. The point is that you want to develop your own personal ritual that you can use to help you mentally let go of the past and stay in the NOW. Take some time during the week and actually practice this ritual in practice. That way when you're under the stress of a big match, you will still be able to regain your focus and composure without having to think about it.

MISTAKE WASTEBASKETS: Another quick technique that you can use to help you let go of your mistakes is to pick one or more "mistake wastebaskets" somewhere on, to the side or behind the court. What's a "mistake wastebasket"? Interesting enough, it's where you can put all your mistakes and unforced errors during the match so that they don't distract you. What you do is pick a spot or one or more objects around the court before the match starts that will serve as your wastebaskets. They should be something that is easy to see from on the court. You can choose a tree, a nearby building, an actual trash can at one side of the court, a part of the bleachers, one of the fence poles, etc. Once you've got your spot picked out, you want to make a "deal" with yourself. The deal is that every time that you mess up, you will "deposit" that mistake in the "wastebasket" until after the match. How do you "deposit" the mistake during the

match? You can simply take a quick look at the spot and, in that look, you are symbolically leaving your mistake there. Or, if your “basket” is on the court, you can literally go over to it and touch it. Or you can even quickly think of that mistake wastebasket and that accomplishes the same task of leaving your mistake behind you.

A variation of this exercise is to combine it with the mistake ritual in the following way. After you make a mistake on the deuce side, for example, you don’t cross the centerline over to the add side to get ready to serve or return for the next point until you have mentally let your last bad shot go. You make a deal with yourself that you will take a few seconds after a mistake to calm yourself down and mentally refocus, and only after you’ve done that do you physically cross over to get ready for the next point.

MISTAKE FOLDERS: A variation of this technique and one used to help emphasize that point that mistakes are to be thought about and worked on after the match and not during it is to imagine that on the bench by the side of the court with your tennis bag, drink and towel you have your very own “mistake folder.” Every time that you make a mistake during the match, you can quickly glance over at your “folder” and that glancing will symbolically deposit your mistake in the folder to be worked on after the match.

THE FIST SQUEEZE TECHNIQUE: As we’ve been discussing, your primary mental task after you make a mistake or experience something upsetting is to immediately let it go. Letting go actually has a physical feeling. Let me demonstrate it to you. Close your eyes right now and gradually tighten your right fist and arm from your fingers all the way to your shoulder. As you gradually tighten your hand and arm from 25% of your strength all the way up to 90% of your strength study the feelings of tension up and down your arm. Hold the tension about 10 seconds and then say the words to yourself, “let go,” and as you do, very slowly begin to let the tension drain out of your right fist and arm. Notice the difference in feeling up and down your arm as the tension slowly drains out. Now repeat this process a second time remembering to keep your eyes closed. Pay particularly close attention to the feelings of letting go as your arm relaxes. Repeat this exercise several times until you can memorize the physical feeling of “letting go.” Practice this exercise a few minutes a day so that you can link the words, “let go” with the actual physical feeling of letting go. In game and match situations, after making a mistake or getting hooked, you can imagine that you’ve just “put” the mistake or bad call in your hand, make a fist, hold it there and then, repeat those words to yourself, “let go.”

You can use this same technique after a particularly bad practice or match. Imagine that you can symbolically place that bad practice/match in your right fist. Tighten it to 90% of your tension, hold it for 10 seconds and then repeat, “let go” to yourself. As

you do, and you begin to feel the feelings of letting go, imagine that you can also let go of that bad performance and all the feelings associated to it.

THE BREATHING TECHNIQUE: During changeovers, and even in between points, completely shift your focus of concentration out of your head and away from your thoughts to the feeling of your breathing. Just follow your breath in and then out. As you exhale, and let go of the breath, imagine that you can also begin to let go of, a little at a time, any disappointment, frustration or anger about what just happened, the last shot, a bad call or getting broken. With each progressive exhalation imagine that you can get rid of the tension, self-doubts and negative feelings until they become completely replaced by composure, relaxation and confidence.

If tennis players aren't getting themselves trapped in the past, the other mental mistake they frequently make is to "time travel" into the FUTURE. When you leave the NOW and go into the FUTURE, you make yourself extremely vulnerable to performance-disrupting nervousness and CHOKING! What does it mean to go into the future? You're thinking about the match's outcome as you're warming up. You're telling yourself that you should be able to beat this opponent. You worry about whether you'll play well or if you'll lose. You think about what people might say if indeed you do lose. You get into the "what-if's?" "What if I choke?" "What if I get re-injured?" "What if I he/she outplays me again?"



Now don't get me wrong. There are times when it is perfectly fine to go into the future. When you do mental rehearsal and you "mentally practice" playing to your potential, staying calm and playing aggressively, you are in the future. This will not get you into trouble as long as your mental sessions are far enough ahead of your match so that they don't get you too nervous. Thinking about your outcome goals in practice, (i.e. your ranking, playing well enough to make varsity or get a scholarship, etc.), why you're working so hard and what you want to accomplish is going into the future. However, it's perfectly fine to spend some time in practice reminding yourself of why you're working hard. The key point here is that you do NOT EVER want to take your goals with you onto the court for a match or an important tournament. Keep in mind that focusing in the future on your goals will motivate you in practice to work hard but having that same future focus going into a match will only serve to get you too uptight to play your best.

REMEMBER: EVERY MOMENT THAT YOU SPEND PRE-MATCH OR DURING THE MATCH WHEN YOUR FOCUS IS EITHER IN THE PAST OR THE FUTURE IS A MOMENT WHERE YOU ARE SETTING YOURSELF UP TO PLAY FAR BELOW YOUR POTENTIAL. The secret to you playing consistently with intensity and a high level of skill is very simple. You must mentally keep yourself in the NOW!

THE MOST IMPORTANT RALLY/POINT IN ANY MATCH IS THE ONE THAT YOU ARE INVOLVED IN RIGHT NOW!

It is critical that you learn to immediately recognize when you are mentally time traveling so that you can very quickly return your focus to the task at hand. If you quickly return your focus to the NOW every time that you drift, then the drifting will not hurt your confidence nor hinder your play. What WILL sabotage your game is when you drift to either the past or future and then you allow yourself to stay there for an extended amount of time.

DEVELOPING AWARENESS OF YOUR MENTAL TIME TRAVELING

Exercise: Spend time in practice working on staying mentally in the NOW. Pick a five minute period every so often during practice where your goal is to mentally keep your focus on what you are doing in the NOW. Every time that you become aware that your focus has drifted backwards to the past and a missed shot or forward to the future and what you might be doing later, quickly return it to the now and what you are doing at that moment. This is an excellent way to build up this very important mental muscle that you need to play championship tennis.

LEAVING YOUR BAD MATCHES IN THE PAST – FORGIVENESS

Want to play like a champion? Want to go as far as possible in this sport? If you do, then you have to learn to be kinder to yourself after you mess up. It's one thing to have high standards and expect yourself to perform to these. It's quite another to put yourself down and emotionally beat yourself up whenever you fail or fall short. Getting down on yourself will NEVER make you a better player. NEVER! What it will do is further kill your confidence and tighten you up like a drum!

Instead you want to learn to forgive yourself for your failures, losses and mistakes. Use your setbacks to figure out what you need to change. Use your failures as feedback to improve. However, do not waste your emotional energy using your failures and losses as evidence that you aren't good enough and as an emotional stick to beat yourself up! This is a huge mistake that will never motivate you to greatness. Instead it will progressively knock you down and crush your spirit. Learn to be a good coach to yourself. Forgive yourself for your humanness. Forgive yourself for your mistakes. Learn what you need to change in order to correct them and then, FORGET THEM!!!

ARE YOU TRYING TO PLAY GOOD TENNIS WITH WEIGHTS ON?

One big mental mistake made by athletes at every level is to go into a match or tournament carrying expectations. As we've discussed, expectations are related to the match or tournament's outcome or your goals. If you want to achieve a certain ranking, qualify for a National tournament, beat a certain opponent, win a prestigious tournament or earn the #1 singles spot on the varsity, then whether you know it or not, you're carrying "heavy" weights into that match/tournament. It's fine for you to have goals and expectations in practice. In fact, your expectations and goals can actually motivate you to go harder and longer in practice. However, a cardinal rule for playing WINNING TENNIS is....

NEVER TAKE YOUR GOALS WITH YOU ONTO THE COURT WHEN IT COUNTS.

Bringing expectations onto the court with you at crunch time will only weigh you down just as sure as if you were wearing 10'lb weights strapped to each ankle and 5'lb'ers strapped to both wrists. You will feel too burdened to play to your potential. When you make a match or tournament too important, when you pressure yourself

with “I have to,” “I’ve got to,” “I need to,” or “What if I don’t?,” then the end result is that you’ll play tight and tentatively. Leave your goals and expectations at home where they belong. Your goals and expectations should only be used as a motivational tool for practice, NEVER as a pressure-inducing threat when the outcome is important to you.

TECHNIQUE: Write your goals down on a piece of paper the week or night before a big match or tournament and then put those goals in a drawer, out of sight. Do not look at your goals until after the performance is completely over. This is exactly what you need to do mentally. You need to keep your goals and expectations out of sight when it comes to your big matches.

STEP EIGHT



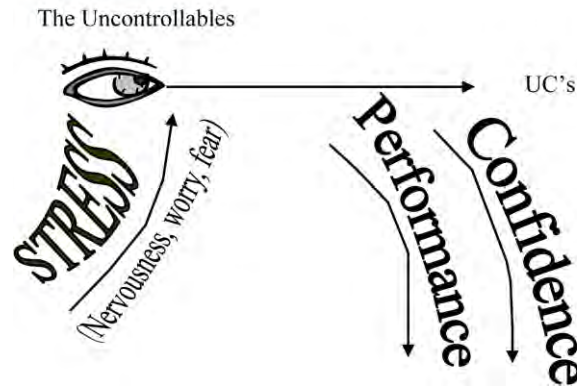
STAYING COOL & CALM IN THE CLUTCH (LEARNING HOW TO HANDLE THE PRESSURE OF BIG MATCHES)

#1 UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES OF CHOKING AND PRE-MATCH NERVOUSNESS

Here's the good news about those pre-match jitters: The importance of the match, try-out or tournament doesn't make you nervous. How talented or strong your opponent is doesn't make you nervous. How big the crowd is doesn't make you nervous. Who you have to play in the next round doesn't make you nervous. Your opponent's ranking and current seeding doesn't make you nervous.

YOU MAKE YOURSELF NERVOUS

It is NOT outside events that cause you to get so nervous that you can't seem to breathe and feel like you're going to leave your lunch on the side of the court. Instead, it's what you say to yourself and focus on both before and during your matches that's the real culprit here. Nervousness comes from inside, not outside of us. This is the good news because you can learn to control what you think about and focus on before and during your matches. It's the good news because with a little bit of practice, you can learn how to calm yourself down under big match pressure.



THE UC'S AS THE MAIN CAUSE OF RUNAWAY NERVES

When you go into a match and either before or during that match you are focusing on one or more UC's or "uncontrollables," then three things will always happen to you. First, you will begin to get nervous and physically tense. Second, you will lose your confidence. Third, and as a direct result of these first two, your game will quickly "head south," down the proverbial tubes. An uncontrollable is any factor before or during your match that is directly out of your control. Uncontrollables are mental traps. They are lying in wait for you and every other tennis player at that tournament. The bigger the competition, the more likelihood there'll be that you will fall into them. How do you avoid a trap? YOU HAVE TO SEE IT! YOU HAVE TO KNOW IT'S THERE! You have to know what the uncontrollables are and especially the ones that have gotten to you in the past.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR "UC'S"

Exercise: Below is a list of some typical uncontrollables. Go through the list and put an asterisk next to each UC that has gotten to you in previous pressured situations. When you're finished, take a piece of paper and list all the uc's that you starred. Next, take this list and post it in a highly visible place in your room. Why would you want to do that? Isn't that sort of negative? If the uncontrollables are traps and the only way to avoid a trap is to be able to "see" it ahead of time, then having such a list will keep you exquisitely aware of what you should stay away from concentration-wise before and during your matches:

THE UC'S

How big the match/tournament/tryout is

How well your teammates' may be playing in their matches

Your opponent – His size, strength, talent, ranking, style of play, etc.

Whether your opponent plays head games or cheats

The tournament officiating

Weather, temperature (hot –cold), wind, sun

The court surface and conditions

Luck – either good or bad

How long you have in between matches

How you feel that day (both physically and emotionally, i.e. sickness, fatigue, injury, etc.)

The kind of warm-up you had

Other people's expectations of you (How they will think of or see you)

What your parents will think or say about how you play, i.e their reaction to the match's outcome

Who's watching the match(scouts in the stands)

Anything related to the FUTURE; i.e winning, losing, closing out the first set, etc.

Anything in the PAST (mistake, double fault, what happened last set or match, missed break opportunities, etc.

The unexpected (your opponent takes a strategic bathroom break or "injury" timeout, etc.)

Academic/personal stuff outside of tennis, i.e. pressure for papers/tests

Injuries that occur during the match

The kind of draw you get

Etc.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Keep in mind that focusing on an uncontrollable by itself won't get you into trouble. What **WILL** get you into performance hot water is focusing on an uncontrollable and **NOT** immediately returning your concentration to those things that you **CAN** control. It is perfectly natural to get periodically knocked off balance by the uc's. When this does happen, be sure that you:

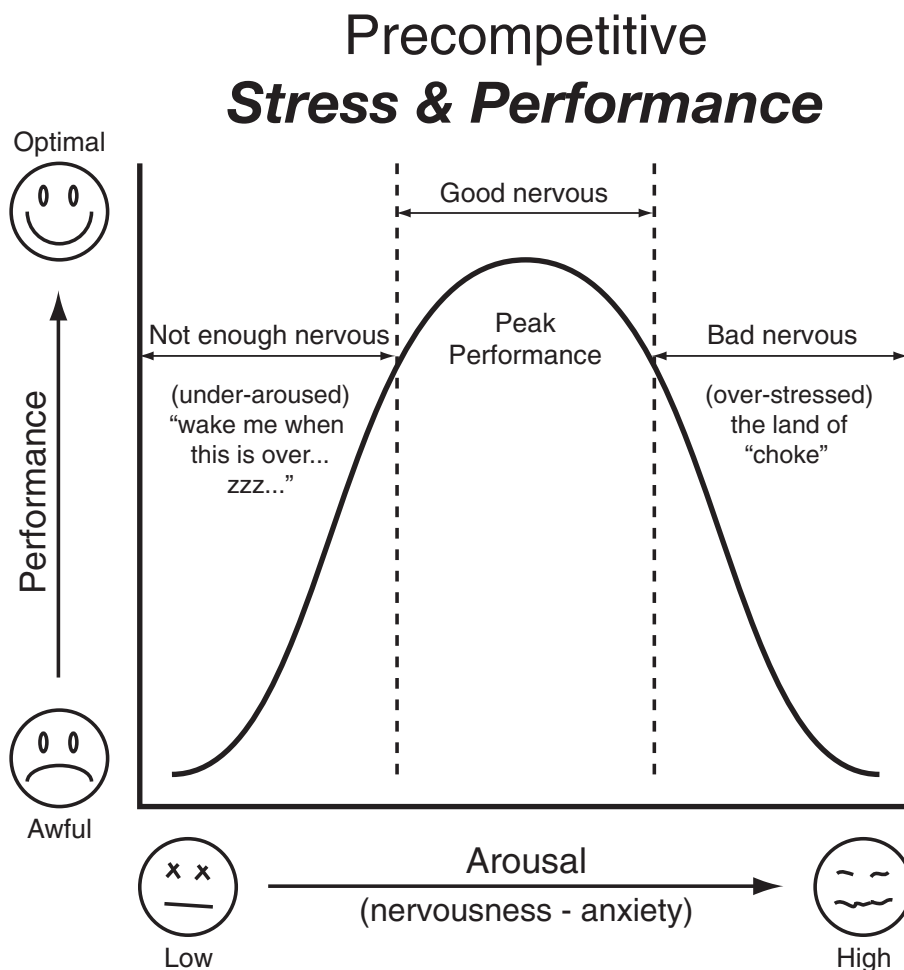
#1 RECOGNIZE THAT WHAT YOU ARE NOW FOCUSING ON IS AN UNCONTROLLABLE; **#2** QUICKLY AND GENTLY RETURN YOUR FOCUS BACK TO WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL AND WHAT'S IMPORTANT AT THAT MOMENT. Remember, the one thing that you can **ALWAYS** learn to control is how **YOU CHOOSE** to react to the uncontrollables.

TO STAY CALM UNDER PRESSURE, BE SURE THAT YOU SHIFT YOUR FOCUS AWAY FROM THE "UNCONTROLLABLES."

#2 READING YOUR LEVEL OF PRE-MATCH NERVOUSNESS/EXCITEMENT

How excited or nervous you are before your matches/tournaments will make or break how well you play. Since the secret to playing great tennis under pressure is to stay loose and relaxed, your ability to consistently do this is absolutely critical to making your tennis dreams come true. "Reading" your level of pre-performance excitement/nervousness is an important first step in getting yourself back in control. (see figure #7 Performance arousal scale/curve)

In figure #7 you can see that as you move from left to right on the horizontal nervousness/excitement scale your level of pre-performance physiological arousal (nervousness) increases from being completely relaxed or under-aroused on the far left to being completely freaked out or over-aroused on the far right. As the diagram illustrates there are three basic levels of pre-game nervousness/excitement: "not enough nervous"; "good nervous"; or "bad nervous." Understand that it is **IMPOSSIBLE** to play to your potential when you are in "not enough" or "bad nervous." If you go into a game overconfident or too cocky, the resultant "not enough nervous" will insure that you play flat. If, on the other hand you go into the match dreading it, worried about losing, feeling too much pressure or in other ways over-aroused, the resultant tight muscles will insure that you choke badly.



Playing your best when it counts the most demands that you be in “good nervous” right before the start. “Good nervous” is actually not nervousness at all but a feeling of being excited, anticipating the match and feeling a sense of confidence that you’re up to the challenge while at the same time, still maintaining a relaxed looseness.

There are 3 primary ways that you “read” your level of pre-performance nervousness:

#1 PHYSICALLY in how you FEEL in your BODY

#2 MENTALLY in how you THINK and what you FOCUS on.

#3 BEHAVIORALLY in how you ACT pre- match.

“Good,” “bad” and “not enough nervous” look and feel different from each other. If you can learn to recognize these differences and your particular signs of “good”, “bad” and, when appropriate “not enough” nervous, then you are one step closer to learning to consistently stay cool and calm in the clutch. The following is a list of some of the general signs of increased nervousness (either “good” or “bad nervous”) in our three main categories:

<u>PHYSICALLY</u>	<u>MENTALLY</u>	<u>BEHAVIORALLY</u>
<i>Increased heart & pulse</i>	<i>Thinking speeds up</i>	<i>Rituals</i>
<i>Faster/shallow breathing</i>	<i>Negative thinking</i>	<i>Mood swings</i>
<i>Tighter muscles</i>	<i>Focus narrows</i>	<i>Getting “hyper”</i>
<i>Cold hands/feet</i>	<i>Increased self-doubts</i>	<i>“motor mouth”</i>
<i>Dry mouth</i>	<i>Critical of self/others</i>	<i>quiet</i>
<i>Frequent yawning</i>	<i>Forgetting</i>	<i>no movement</i>
<i>Heaviness in limbs</i>	<i>Negative images</i>	<i>nervous habits</i>
<i>Energy/lightness</i>	<i>The “what if’s”</i>	<i>superstitions</i>
<i>Fatigue</i>	<i>Getting “spacey”</i>	<i>“the giggles”</i>
<i>Nausea</i>	<i>Positive/negative attitude</i>	<i>hostility</i>
<i>Vomiting</i>	<i>mental rehearsal</i>	<i>withdrawal</i>
<i>Frequent urinating</i>	<i>increased confidence</i>	
<i>“The runs”</i>	<i>hang onto mistakes</i>	
<i>increased sweating</i>	<i>let mistakes go</i>	

LEARNING TO "READ" YOUR OWN PERSONAL SIGNS

Exercise: Think back to several really great past performances. These reflect a state of "good nervous." Using Worksheet #6 and the above three columns as a guide, try to recall in as much detail as possible exactly how you felt physically, what you thought about/focused on, and how you acted before each of these top performances. Next compare all your responses and you should discover your typical signs of "good nervous." Now do the same for several sub-par performances using Worksheet #7. (most bad performances are a direct result of too much excitement or "bad nervous" rather than a state of "not enough nervous.") Again, use the three categories to help you get specific about what your "bad" or "not enough nervous" looked like. Once you've reviewed several bad performances in this way, see if you can discover any patterns in how you experienced "bad" or, when applicable, "not enough nervous." These patterns will reflect your typical signs of "bad (or not enough) nervous."



#3 ACTING AS IF

The “ACT AS IF” strategy is one of the more important mental toughness techniques to help you get yourself back in control when the pressure is turned way up high and the garbage is hitting the fan. ACT AS IF is based on the principle:

IF YOU ACT THE WAY THAT YOU WANT TO FEEL, SOON YOU WILL BEGIN TO FEEL THE WAY THAT YOU ACT.

The way that you feel on the inside, your EMOTIONS, are always determined by how you act on the outside, your MOTIONS. In other words the way that you physically carry yourself, your posture, facial expression, physical gestures, walk, head and shoulders will ultimately affect and determine how you end up feeling emotionally. After an unforced error, double fault or loss of the first set many tennis players will hang their head, drop their shoulders, put a disgusted or down look upon their face and drag their feet around. However, when you ACT discouraged and down, when you act like a loser, you will begin to FEEL even more bummed out. Instead you want to ACT AS IF. You want to keep your feelings/emotions INSIDE and on the OUTSIDE you want to act like everything is fine.

Keep in mind that ACTING AS IF has absolutely nothing to do with moving your lips or trying to trick or convince yourself that everything is fine. Everything isn’t fine and it’s OK to acknowledge that fact on the INSIDE. However, on the OUTSIDE you want to act like you’re in control by keeping your head and shoulders up, a smile or neutral expression on your face and maintaining a spring in your step and energy in your behaviors.

ACTING AS IF is what I call a WINNER’S FALL BACK POSITION. When a winner is exhausted, she will physically act like she has a ton of energy. When a winner is nervous, he’ll physically act calm. When a winner is discouraged or down she will act as if she’s up. Acting as if is the FAKE IT ‘TIL YOU MAKE IT STRATEGY where you are deliberately TELLING A LIE with you body! So pre- match, when you can feel your lunch coming up and you can’t seem to stop your knees from knocking together, ACT AS IF you are calm and in control. Deliberately act exactly the way that you would as if you were in “good nervous.” If before all of your great matches you were jumping around, laughing and joking with your friends, then get off your butt and start doing that!

One of the main reasons that ACTING AS IF is such an important strategy is because tennis is a game of momentum shifts. You can be up one minute and down the next de-

pending upon how certain points and games play out. Whether these momentum shifts overwhelm you or not, whether they give your opponent the added edge to pull off the win depends entirely on how you respond when things are going badly. If you hang your head after an unforced error or service break, if you show your upset and disgust when you start losing, then you are inadvertently giving your opponent a psychological and emotional boost by acting like a loser.

Anytime you show your negative emotions on the court either by dropping your shoulders, angrily smashing your racquet down on the court or against your leg, yelling out in disgust, etc. you are letting your opponent know that you are upset and therefore vulnerable. You are telling him/her, "I'm in trouble and if you apply pressure on me now I'll completely crack!" It's like being in a high stakes poker game but continually showing your cards to your opponent. When you do that, you'll lose your shirt! When your opponent is up and things go against you, you want to show your opponent absolutely nothing. You want to keep a neutral or intense expression on your face and ACT AS IF nothing has happened. When your opponent sees that time after time over the course of the match, you have no negative reaction when things go against you, it will ultimately have an intimidating effect on him.

So keep your cards to yourself when you play. ACT LIKE A WINNER all the time on the court. Keep your head up, your shoulders square and speed in your step whenever things go wrong. Do not let on that you may be feeling down or discouraged inside. On the outside always show your opponent the behavior of a champion.

4 STAYING CALM IN THE CLUTCH: RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

SLOW AND DEEPEN YOUR BREATHING

When you're nervous, your breathing speeds up and gets faster. This kind of shallow, rapid breathing will tighten your muscles and tire you out prematurely, causing you to slow down on the court and play poorly. To help you quickly calm yourself down under pressure you must learn to control the depth and rate of your breathing. Sit quietly in a room free from distractions and put your concentration on your diaphragm or lower belly. Inhale very, very slowly focusing on your lower belly filling up like a balloon. At the top of your breath, when you can't take in any more air, pause for a slow count of 3 or 4. Then exhale, much slower than normal and feel your lower belly deflate. Repeat this sequence and imagine that as you inhale, you are completely

surrounded by a white cloud. The cloud is filled with fresh oxygen, energy, confidence, calmness, strength, endurance, etc. As you inhale very slowly and feel your diaphragm rise, watch that cloud go in through your nose. At the top of your breath when you can't take in any more, pause and as you count slowly to 3 or 4, imagine that you can experience all that good stuff that you inhaled moving throughout your body. As you exhale slowly and feel your belly fall, imagine that you can watch that cloud come out from the tip of your nose, as you get rid of any negative energy, fatigue, self-doubts, stress, etc. Notice that as you exhale, the cloud now comes out a much darker color like black or brown. Repeat 8 – 10 of these slow, diaphragmatic breaths being sure to concentrate on the feeling of the air coming in and going out and “watching” in your mind's eye, the cloud coming in and going out.

NOTE: Like all the exercises and techniques in this workbook, consistent practice of this breathing technique will enable you to confidently rely on it in pressured situations. Two or more of these diaphragmatic breaths right before the match or that big game will help you calm down and get yourself back into “good nervous.”

STRETCH

Stretching is an easy and effective way to quickly calm yourself down pre- match. When done the correct way, stretching will loosen your muscles and provide you with a calming focal point where you can rest your concentration. The key to correct pre-match stretching is very simple. Make sure that as you physically stretch, your focus of concentration is completely on what you are doing in that moment and on the feeling of the stretching. It does you absolutely no good to stretch pre- match if, while you stretch, you're allowing your concentration to wander to your opponent, the outcome of the match or anything else that would distract you and get you uptight. Focus on the stretch while you stretch. In other words, stay in the “here & now.”

TIGHTEN & RELEASE

Another quick technique to help you physically loosen up right before and even during that big match is an abbreviation of the progressive muscle relaxation exercise. It involves focusing on any part of you that feels tight at the moment and deliberately tightening it even more for a short amount of time before then releasing the tension. For example, let's say that you have tension up and down your legs, deliberately tighten those already tense muscles even more. Hold the muscle tension for 10 seconds and as you do so, be sure that your concentration is on the feeling of the tension in your leg

muscles. Then say to yourself, “let go,” and as you do, slowly release all the muscle tension in that area. Then, repeat the sequence of deliberately tightening the muscles, holding the tension for 10 seconds and releasing. This is a very quick and effective way for you to loosen yourself up right before that big match or important tryout. You can also use it in between points, games or during the changeover.

USING IMAGERY FOR RELAXATION

You can also effectively calm yourself down by using your imagination to mentally take yourself to a calm, safe place. Sit quietly, close your eyes and imagine yourself going to a totally relaxing place like a favorite beach, mountainside, woods or vacation spot. Experience yourself comfortably enjoying this place in as much detail as possible, seeing, hearing and feeling everything that you would as if you were actually there. Allow yourself to stay in this calming place for 5 – 10 minutes at a time until you feel calm, relaxed and in control. Regular “visits” to this mental “relaxation room” will make it available to you under pressure, right before that big match. However, if you never consistently practice this exercise at home when you’re completely relaxed, then you’ll find that it won’t be “open” and available for you when you need it the most under pressure.

STEP NINE



PREPARING YOURSELF TO PLAY LIKE A CHAMPION WHEN IT COUNTS THE MOST USING MENTAL REHEARSAL

Mental rehearsal is a very simple, yet powerful mental skill that you can regularly use to help you stay calm under competitive pressure, build confidence, quickly let go of mistakes and bad breaks and more effectively play to your potential. Mental rehearsal or visualization is nothing more than deliberate mental practice where you imagine, in vivid detail, (seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling), playing the perfect match from your warm-up and pre-match ritual, right through to match point including feelings of celebration and accomplishment.

Mental rehearsal works because what you vividly imagine stimulates the nerve-muscle connections involved in the actual movements. Repetitive stimulation of these connections forms a pathway for your muscles to follow once the actual movements are undertaken. In this way, mental rehearsal, when it's properly done, leaves you with a confident feeling of preparedness, like you've already been there. With sufficient practice, you can fine-tune this mental skill to the point where you can consistently raise the level of your game.

Follow these simple guidelines to help you master the skill of mental rehearsal and better prepare you for those high pressured matches:

1. Always start your imagery sessions with several minutes of relaxation. Your imagery will be far more effective when you're completely relaxed. (DO NOT do imagery when you're anxious)

2. Do NOT use mental rehearsal too close to the actual start of your match. If you do, you will make yourself too nervous to play your best. Some athletes need to stop a day or two before the match. Others can use imagery right up until an hour or so before the actual start. Experiment to discover which time frame works best for you.
3. Make your imagery as vivid and detailed as possible including pictures, sounds, muscle feelings and even smells.
4. Have a specific goal in mind for your mental rehearsal sessions. For example, if you regularly get upset and hang onto your mistakes, “practice” quickly letting your miscues go and following them up with strong play. Or practice going for your shots, hitting your strokes aggressively, attacking the short ball and coming to the net, hitting an ace or playing steady and consistent.
5. Try to feel what you’d be feeling as if you were actually in the match. Your game/match imagery will be much more effective if you can step into the physical feelings of the play and “practice” these.
6. Have a beginning, middle and end to each of your sessions. The beginning can involve traveling to the match, your warm-up, pre-match ritual and the start and first set of the match. The middle could include the beginning of the second set and the end could include playing a match deciding tie-breaker or closing out the final set. Be sure to include the post match celebration and feelings of excitement and accomplishment, etc.
7. Make your mental rehearsal sessions short. (10 minutes at the most including a 4-5 minute period of relaxation).
8. Always try to imagine what you want to have happen and how you want to feel, NOT what you’re afraid will happen or don’t want.
9. If your images turn negative at any point in your session, be patient and “re-wind” them, replaying the scene again and again until they turn out the way that you want them to.

Keep in mind that mental rehearsal is a learned skill. In the beginning, you may close your eyes and see nothing but a blank slate. Be patient and keep practicing. Just because you can’t consciously see, feel or hear anything doesn’t mean that your imagery isn’t working. You are always making images unconsciously and these images are just as powerful and effective as the ones that you are consciously aware of. When you

go to do an imagery session and can't "see" or "feel" anything, just think your way through what you want to be going on in as much detail as possible.

USING "COPING IMAGERY" TO EFFECTIVELY HANDLE STRESSFUL SITUATIONS BEFORE AND DURING YOUR MATCHES

Mental rehearsal is a wonderful tool to help you learn to stay calm under pressure and to build confidence in your ability to handle stressors that in the past might have gotten you too nervous to perform your best. Let's say, for example, that having to play a certain opponent would freak you out and undermine your confidence. Use your mental rehearsal session to vividly imagine yourself staying calm, cool and focused in this situation and then playing him/her strongly. Similarly, if you tend to get too upset over questionable calls, mentally practice refocusing yourself immediately after an obvious bad call and playing with renewed concentration and intensity. If your problem is one of being too nervous pre-match, then mentally practice staying relaxed and in control right before the start of the match and then going out there and playing your own game, loose, relaxed and confidently. Similarly if you have a bad habit of hanging onto your unforced errors and mistakes and then beating yourself up for them, "practice" quickly forgiving yourself, letting them go and playing strongly right after messing up.

STEP TEN



UTILIZING A “CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH PLAN” TO PLAY LIKE A CHAMPION

Perhaps one of the biggest mental mistakes that tennis players make at their more pressured tournaments and matches is to take the wrong goals with them into their matches. What are the wrong goals? Anything related to outcome like, WINNING, NEEDING TO BEAT A PARTICULAR OPPONENT, WANTING TO GET A CERTAIN RANKING, WANTING TO PROVE TO THE COACH THAT YOU DESERVE THE #1 SINGLES SPOT, NOT WANTING TO DISAPPOINT MOM OR DAD, etc. Outcome goals tend to distract you from the task at hand and get you too nervous and tight to play your best. Remember, your outcome goals are strictly a motivational tool for practice only! To perform your best when it counts the most you must learn to “carry” different goals onto the court with you. These goals, when focused on and accomplished, will GUARANTEE that you’ll achieve your outcome goals. These goals make up what I call a CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH PLAN.

What is a Championship Match Plan? A Championship Match Plan is like a recipe for peak performance. Like any recipe, it has specific ingredients that must be utilized in order to achieve the desired outcome. Like any recipe, when some of these “ingredients” are omitted, what you end up with will leave you with a “nasty taste” in your mouth! Look over the following mini-goals of this basic CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH PLAN and see which ones will help you cook up one mean match:

THE CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH PLAN

1) STAY LOOSE & RELAXED – The secret to playing your best when it counts the most lies in your ability to stay mentally and physically loose under pressure. Excessive pre-match nervousness is the number one cause of choking and bad performance. Therefore it is absolutely critical that you have several relaxation tools in your mental toughness toolbox. Simply put, you need to know **HOW** to relax when the competitive pressure is turned up high. Things you can do pre-match to actually achieve this stay of relaxation: Control your breathing; stretch; listen to music; distract yourself with light or funny conversation with friends/teammates; Do **NOT** focus on the importance of the match; Use relaxation techniques. (See section, “Staying cool and calm in the clutch” for these).

2) HAVE FUN – One oftentimes overlooked, but critical ingredient in great performances is **FUN**! If you are having fun **BEFORE** and **WHILE** you play, then chances are good that you will remain loose enough to play your best. Too many athletes wait until after the match before deciding whether they had fun or not, i.e. “When I play well, that’s fun,” or “Let me beat him and then I’ll have fun,” etc. If you have to wait until after the outcome of the match before you can decide whether you’ve had fun or not, then you’ve got it **BACKWARDS**! You can’t play great tennis at **ANY LEVEL** unless you’re having fun **FIRST**! **FUN IS AN ABSOLUTE MUST IN ORDER FOR YOU TO DO YOUR BEST**. If you’re **NOT** having fun, then you won’t play well. So before the match, let yourself get into the challenge. Get into hanging with your friends, laughing and joking. Whatever is fun for you at the match or tournament, then you want to make sure that you’re doing it and enjoying yourself.

3) STAY FOCUSED IN THE “NOW” – You play your best when you can keep your concentration in the “now,” on the point that you’re involved in at that moment. If you are in the past or the future before or during a match, then you will always be a step or two behind. The only mental time zone where you have access to all your skills, reaction times and speed is the **NOW**. Remember, **THE MOST IMPORTANT POINT IN ANY GAME IS THE ONE THAT YOU’RE PLAYING RIGHT NOW!**

4) WHEN YOU “TIME TRAVEL” (PAST OR FUTURE) RECOGNIZE THAT YOU’VE LEFT THE NOW AND QUICKLY AND GENTLY BRING YOUR FOCUS BACK TO THE NOW
- Remember, drifting won’t hurt you as long as you stay on top of it. When your focus lags behind or jumps ahead, quickly return it to the now. Each point that you play where your focus is in the past or the future is a point where you’re handicapping yourself, a point that you’re playing way below your abilities!

5) PLAY YOUR OWN GAME/FOCUS ON YOU – Want to beat that annoying opponent? Want to play the kind of tennis that you’re fully capable of? If you do, then you’ll stay focused on YOU and playing YOUR game. Being overly concerned with your opponent, teammates, the coaches, the crowd or what other people may think will mentally take you out of your game and cause you to play poorly. Focus on YOU! Stay inside yourself. Play YOUR OWN game.

6) WHEN YOUR FOCUS LEAVES YOU, RECOGNIZE YOU’RE DRIFTING AND QUICKLY AND GENTLY BRING YOUR FOCUS BACK TO YOU – If you find yourself preoccupied with someone else before or during your matches, your immediate job is to catch yourself and quickly return your focus back to you, your game and what you’re doing in the moment. You can’t play great tennis if you’re distracted by those around you.

7) KEEP TRACK OF THE “UC’S” (UNCONTROLLABLES) – Focusing on any uncontrollable either before or during your match will get you uptight, undermine your self-confidence and ruin your game. Your job going into those high pressured situations is to know what your “UC’S” are and to make sure that your focus stays away from them. If you should find yourself concentrating on an uncontrollable, quickly return your focus to what you are doing. Remember, you can always control how YOU CHOOSE to react to any uncontrollable.

8) USE LAST MINUTE NEGATIVE THINKING AND SELF-DOUBTS AS A NEUTRAL SIGNAL TO RELAX AND REFOCUS – Remember, last minute doubts and negativity are quite normal. When you hear their nasty little chatter in your ears right before the start of the match or just as you’re about to serve or receive serve, RELAX. Do NOT engage the negativity. Instead, immediately refocus your concentration on the task at hand. Allowing yourself to “jump in” to the negative thoughts will tend to get you “emotionally hijacked.” Negative thinking and doubts are nothing more than brain wave activity. They are NOT a prediction of what will happen. Change the channel and refocus on the task at hand, this next point.

9) DON’T THINK, JUST PLAY – Playing great tennis is all about feel, flow and reacting and NOT about thinking. Thinking is hazardous to your health as a player. You can’t think your way through a good match. You have to get out of your own way and allow your muscle memory and instincts to take over. Before that big match, reassure yourself that you’ve paid your physical dues, that you’ve done everything that you can possibly do to prepare and then completely put your concentration on FEEL and REACT. Thinking always distracts you from the important task at hand and slows you down.

10) TRUST AND LET IT HAPPEN – If you have made an honest investment in your training, then that great match that you so desperately want is already inside of you as you read these words. How do you get that great match to come out? You have to relax, trust your training, trust your coaching, trust your muscle memory and just let the games come to you. You don't need to force it. Just let it flow.

11) USE FOCAL POINTS BEFORE AND DURING YOUR GAMES – Since quickly catching your drifting focus and bringing it back is so important to mental toughness, it is absolutely critical that you have specific focal points and pre-performance rituals that you can return your concentration to. Know ahead of time what your pre-match and during match rituals/focal points are. Have a specific pre-match ritual picked out ahead of time that you feel comfortable using. Your rituals help keep you confident and composed under pressure.

12) FORGIVE YOURSELF FOR YOUR MISTAKES AND BAD MATCHES, LEARN FROM THEM AND LEAVE THEM IN THE PAST – Understand that your success as an athlete is based on your failures. You can NOT become a champion without failing ENOUGH!!! Therefore, how you handle your failures and losses is absolutely critical to how successful you'll ultimately become as a tennis player. When you have a bad match, look for what you did wrong. DON'T waste your time and energy beating yourself up! Getting down on yourself has no constructive value whatsoever. Instead, learn from your mistakes and losses, forgive yourself for being human and then leave these disappointments in the PAST where they belong!

USING THE CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH PLAN

Choose all or any number of the above goals that fit for you. Write them down on a piece of paper. Make several copies. Put one up on your wall or mirror in your bedroom, put one inside your locker at school and keep one in your tennis bag. Look at these goals before your matches. Remember their purpose. The match plan is designed to help you stay focused on what's important. After a match, take a few minutes to evaluate your performance in relation to this match plan. That is, ask yourself, "on a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 = not at all and 10 = a perfect job, how well did I accomplish each goal?" Answers of 7- 8 or less indicate the need for more improvement on that particular goal for your next game. Answers of 9 or 10 indicate that you executed that particular goal quite effectively. Remember, the way to get to that great match is by following the goals of the CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH PLAN.

CONCLUSION

Once you get to that big match/tournament, how well you play depends almost entirely on how mentally tough you are. Remember what I said when we started this program: “In matches and when it really counts, tennis is 95% mental and 5% physical.” Don’t leave this all-important mental side of your game to chance. Your mind is far too powerful a force to leave untrained. Harness the awesome power of your mind today by beginning to systematically work on developing mental toughness. Use this workbook to strengthen your mental muscles, build your self-confidence and help you stay cool and calm in the clutch. Remember, you can’t play winning tennis without using your head. So start today to systematically develop the mind of a champion.



WORKSHEET #1**SELF-TALK AND BAD PERFORMANCES***(Bad match #1)*

What was your self-talk/thoughts ...

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during your warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you got broken?
- 5) ...after making a mistake?
- 6) ...when a teammate or coach yelled at you?
- 7) ...when a call went against you?
- 8)against a particularly aggressive opponent?
- 9)If you lost the match?

WORKSHEET #1

SELF-TALK AND BAD PERFORMANCES*(Bad match #2)*

What was your self-talk/thoughts ...

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during your warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you got broken?
- 5) ...after making a mistake?
- 6) ...when a teammate or coach yelled at you?
- 7) ...when a call went against you?
- 8) ...against a particularly aggressive opponent?
- 9) ...If you lost the match?

WORKSHEET #1**SELF-TALK AND BAD PERFORMANCES***(Bad match #3)*

What was your self-talk/thoughts ...

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during your warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you got broken?
- 5) ...after making a mistake?
- 6) ...when a teammate or coach yelled at you?
- 7) ...when a call went against you?
- 8) ...against a particularly aggressive opponent?
- 9) ...If you lost the match?

WORKSHEET #2

SELF-TALK AND GOOD PERFORMANCES*(Good match #1)*

What were yourself-talk/thoughts.....

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during your warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you got broken?
- 5) ...after making a mistake?
- 6) ...when a teammate or coach yelled at you?
- 7) ...when a call went against you?
- 8) ...against a particularly aggressive opponent?
- 9) ...If you lost the match?

WORKSHEET #2**SELF-TALK AND GOOD PERFORMANCES***(Good match #2)*

What were your self-talk/thoughts.....

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during your warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you got broken?
- 5) ...after making a mistake?
- 6) ...when a teammate or coach yelled at you?
- 7) ...when a call went against you?
- 8) ...against a particularly aggressive, trash talking opponent?
- 9) ...If you lost the match?

WORKSHEET #2

SELF-TALK AND GOOD PERFORMANCES*(Good match #3)*

What were yourself-talk/thoughts.....

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during your warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you got broken?
- 5) ...after making a mistake?
- 6) ...when a teammate or coach yelled at you?
- 7) ...when a call went against you?
- 8) ...against a particularly aggressive, trash talking opponent?
- 9) ...If you lost the match?

WORKSHEET #3

CONCENTRATION AND GOOD PERFORMANCES

(Good match #1)

Where was your focus of concentration.....

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you made a mistake?
- 5) ...after you made a great shot?
- 6) ...when your opponent made a bad call?
- 7) ...after getting broken by your opponent?
- 8) ...between sets?
- 9) ...when you went to make a crucial serve?
- 10) ...during a tiebreaker?
- 11) ...against a strong opponent?
- 12) ...trying to close out the match?

WORKSHEET #3

CONCENTRATION AND GOOD PERFORMANCES*(Good match #2)*

Where was your focus of concentration.....

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you made a mistake?
- 5) ...after you made a great shot?
- 6) ...when your opponent made a bad call?
- 7) ...after getting broken by your opponent?
- 8) ...between sets?
- 9) ...when you went to make a crucial serve?
- 10) ...during a tiebreaker?
- 11) ...against a strong opponent?
- 12) ...trying to close out the match?

WORKSHEET #3

CONCENTRATION AND GOOD PERFORMANCES

(Good match #3)

Where was your focus of concentration.....

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you made a mistake?
- 5) ...after you made a great shot?
- 6) ...when your opponent made a bad call?
- 7) ...after getting broken by your opponent?
- 8) ...between sets?
- 9) ...when you went to make a crucial serve?
- 10) ...during a tiebreaker?
- 11) ...against a strong opponent?
- 12) ...trying to close out the match?

WORKSHEET #4

CONCENTRATION AND BAD PERFORMANCES*(Bad match #1)*

Where was your focus of concentration.....

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you made a mistake?
- 5) ...after you made a great shot?
- 6) ...when your opponent made a bad call?
- 7) ...after getting broken by your opponent?
- 8) ...between sets?
- 9) ...when you went to make a crucial serve?
- 10) ...during a tiebreaker?
- 11) ...against a strong opponent?
- 12) ...trying to close out the match?

WORKSHEET #4**CONCENTRATION AND BAD PERFORMANCES***(Bad match #2)*

Where was your focus of concentration.....

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you made a mistake?
- 5) ...after you made a great shot?
- 6) ...when your opponent made a bad call?
- 7) ...after getting broken by your opponent?
- 8) ...between sets?
- 9) ...when you went to make a crucial serve?
- 10) ...during a tiebreaker?
- 11) ...against a strong opponent?
- 12) ...trying to close out the match?

WORKSHEET #4

CONCENTRATION AND BAD PERFORMANCES*(Bad match #3)*

Where was your focus of concentration.....

- 1) ...the day of the match?
- 2) ...during warm-up?
- 3) ...just before the match started?
- 4) ...after you made a mistake?
- 5) ...after you made a great shot?
- 6) ...when your opponent made a bad call?
- 7) ...after getting broken by your opponent?
- 8) ...between sets?
- 9) ...when you went to make a crucial serve?
- 10) ...during a tiebreaker?
- 11) ...against a strong opponent?
- 12) ...trying to close out the match?

WORKSHEET #5

DO YOU PLAY BETTER IN PRACTICE THAN YOU DO IN MATCHES?*(Compare and contrast)*

PRACTICE/MATCHES: What do you tend to focus on...

- 1) ...before you get to the court?
- 2) ...during warm-ups?
- 3) ...just before the start of play (match or practice)
- 4) ...when you begin to feel tired?
- 5) ...when you mess up?
- 6) ...when you start to get outplayed?
- 7) ...when the coach criticizes you?
- 8) ...when your serve isn't going in?
- 9) How much do you concentrate on other players?
- 10) How much does your focus drift to the future & outcome?
- 11) How much do you compare yourself?
- 12) How much time do you spend focusing on what you think you are doing poorly?
- 13) How easily distracted are you?

WORKSHEET #6

SIGNS OF GOOD NERVOUS

Great match #1

Physical signs
(in body)

Mental signs
(thinking/focusing)

Behavioral signs
(how I acted pre-match)

Great match #2

Physical signs

Mental signs

Behavioral signs

WORKSHEET #7

SIGNS OF BAD (OR NOT ENOUGH) NERVOUSBad match #1

Physical signs

(in body)

Mental signs

(thinking/focusing)

Behavioral signs

(how I acted pre-match)

Bad match #2

Physical signs

Mental signs

Behavioral signs

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