Mental training for tournament tennis players
By the end of this session you should be able to:

• Identify the psychological characteristics of tennis and of tennis champions
• Understand and use the basics of motivation, concentration, emotional control and self-confidence for tennis performance
• Identify the keys for mental performance in tournament play
• Understand and use some principles for dealing with parents
Mental characteristics of tennis (I)

- Individual game
- No coaching allowed
- High percentage of fast decisions
- A lot of time to think during the match
- Don’t know when you start or when you finish the match
- No substitutes permitted
Mental characteristics of tennis (II)

- Knock out competition system
- Played in different surfaces, continents, different types of balls, etc.
- Recreational tennis: the umpire is the opponent
- Tear round professional circuit (no rest periods during the season)
Mental characteristics of tennis (III)

• Ranking based on best results during different years
• No time-out decided by the player
• “Silent game”, a lot of concentration is needed
• All shots are important
Why the mental side of tennis is not practised so much?

• Mental skills are incorrectly believed to be innate, i.e. that they are impossible to change
• Hard to find psychologists specialising in tennis
• Mental skills were not needed in the past, so why now?
• Coaches don’t know how to teach mental skills
Champions' feelings when playing their best tennis (I)

- Mentally very strong and determined.
- Positive but realistic.
- Highly confident, energetic and ready for action.
- Focused concentration and mentally alert.
- Physically relaxed and calm under pressure.
Champions' feelings when playing their best tennis (II)

- Effortless and automatic.
- Lack of fear, enjoying the battle.
- In control and fully responsible.
- Enjoyment.
- High need for achievement and drive to win.
- Extremely competitive and playing with high intensity.
Champions' feelings when playing their best tennis (III)

- Ideal Performance State
- In the zone
- Flow
- Positive momentum
MENTAL SKILLS NEEDED FOR TENNIS

- Concentration
- Motivation
- Emotional control
- Control of thoughts
Motivation

- Desire to start and then persist at an activity
- ‘Engine’ of all behaviours
- ‘Without motivation, there will be no action’
- Reasons for playing
- Reasons for giving up tennis
- Commitment
# Motivation: Persistence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main reasons why people play tennis</th>
<th>Main reasons why people give up tennis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Social interaction,</td>
<td>1. Too much pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Fun and excitement,</td>
<td>2. Time consuming,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Feelings of mastery,</td>
<td>3. Boring lessons,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Demonstrating competence,</td>
<td>4. Dislike of the coach,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Learning or improving skills,</td>
<td>5. Lack of playing time,</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Feeling worthy and satisfaction gained from improving,</td>
<td>6. Lack of skill improvement and difficulty in learning,</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Being with friends or making new ones,</td>
<td>7. Participating in another sport, not challenged, etc.</td>
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<td>8. Being part of a team, etc.</td>
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</table>
Intrinsic / Extrinsic motivation

INTERNAL REASONS

• Love the game.
• Desire to:
  – be competent
  – master the task
  – be successful
• Play for:
  – inner pride and sheer joy,
  – pleasure, fun, and curiosity

EXTERNAL REASONS

• Get:
  – tangible (trophies, money, etc.) or
  – intangible (recognition, praise) rewards.

• Internal reasons rated by most tennis players as the most important motives for playing tennis
Extrinsic rewards and intrinsic motivation

• Help to transform extrinsic into intrinsic motivation
• Are administered but by the players themselves
• Provide information, not control, about the player’s competence
• Are given on the quality of the performance, not on the outcome and in the correct proportion
Motivational problems

• Lack of motivation:
  – For practice during pre-season, for playing in lower level tournaments.

• Excess of motivation:
  – When confronting very important matches or after a series of successive wins.

• Negative motivation:
  – Fear of winning, losing, playing against certain opponents and in certain competitions. Fear of injury.

• False motivation
  – ‘If I lose this match, I will give up, ‘When I lose, I always blame myself’.
Increasing motivation

- Make tennis fun!
- Keep a daily log of your successes.
- Associate with highly self-motivated players.
- Use of goal setting
- Be positive
Concentration

- Focus
- On the relevant cues
- Maintain the focus
- During a given time
- Key to control player emotions
## Types of concentration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Width of attention</th>
<th>Direction of attention</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Broad</strong></td>
<td>External</td>
<td><strong>Broad external</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Used to rapidly assess a situation, weather, playing surface, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g. doubles exchange at net, to see where the opponent is)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td><strong>Broad internal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Used to analyse what happened in a game and to plan tactics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g. developing a game plan against an opponent, analysing why the previous game was lost)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrow</strong></td>
<td>External</td>
<td><strong>Narrow external</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Used to focus exclusively on one or two external cues</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g. watching the ball, picking up cues from the opponent: ball toss, backswing)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td><strong>Narrow internal</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Used to mentally rehearse an upcoming performance or control an emotional state</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(e.g. mentally rehearse the serve, monitor the self-talk and feelings of stress, etc.)</td>
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</table>
Problems of concentration

• Lack of interest in the match
• A lot of starts and stops (‘dead time’)
• Focusing on too many cues
• Focusing on past events or future events
• Paralysis by analysis
• Choking
• Interferences
Emotional control arousal-performance

Level of performance +

Overarousal

Ideal Performance State

Underarousal

Level of Arousal

+ Level of Arousal -
Sources of anxiety

• Fear of failure, e.g. ‘What if I lose this match?’
• Feeling of inadequacy, e.g. ‘I don’t think I’m able to play well today’
• Loss of control, e.g. ‘The chair umpire is continuously making bad calls’
• Body complaints, e.g. ‘I’m feeling very stiff’
### How excess anxiety is manifested

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physically</th>
<th>Psychologically</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>• Muscle tension loss of coordination (muscles too tight).</td>
<td>• Reduced concentration and difficulty in refocusing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reduced flexibility.</td>
<td>• Decreasing emotional control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Become fatigued very quickly.</td>
<td>• Feelings of fear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Very fast heart rate, shallow and irregular breathing.</td>
<td>• Impaired strategy and tactical judgement (poor decision making).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Legs feel weak (muscular weakness).</td>
<td>• Giving up-stop trying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ‘Jerky’ rhythm of play.</td>
<td>• Everything appears to be going too fast.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Inability to think clearly and accurately.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increasingly negative and self-critical thoughts.</td>
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<td>• Persistent sense of pessimism about the future.</td>
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How under activation is manifested

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<td>• Feeling that the player has not much energy.</td>
<td>• Lack of concern about how well the player will play.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Feeling slow.</td>
<td>• Easily distracted; poor concentration.</td>
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<td>• Heavy feeling in legs: no bounce.</td>
<td>• Low patience and ‘don’t really care’ feeling; no enthusiasm.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Moving slowly: poor preparation.</td>
<td>• Lack of anticipation or timing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Head and shoulders down.</td>
<td>• Sense of ‘giving up’ and helplessness (‘nothing I do works’).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Eyes wandering: Watching outside the court.</td>
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<td>• Physically looking lazy.</td>
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Confidence

• Self-confidence is the player’s expectation of success or failure
• The belief that one can successfully perform a desired behaviour in a given situation
• The most consistent factor distinguishing highly successful from less successful players
• Top players display a strong belief in their abilities
Relationship between confidence and performance

[Diagram showing the relationship between level of performance and level of confidence. The graph is curved with an ideal performance state in the middle.]

Level of performance

+ Level of Confidence

Ideal Performance State
Problems with self-confidence

CANDIDATES’ TASK
Give and example of each one

• Events that are bad
• Lack of confidence
• Overconfidence
• Thoughts that create pressure and affect self-confidence
• Aspects that indicate low self-confidence
Before the match candidates’ task

Why routines are good for mental preparation for a match?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
Routines

• Pre match plan that keeps the player focused.
• Routines to focus solely on the oncoming match.
• Concentration and relaxation.
• Set aside 20-30 min before the match in a quiet site
• Prepare yourself for ‘playing in the zone’ visualising how you want to play and feel
During the match candidates’ task

In which ways do players emotionally respond during a match?

1.

2.

3.

4.
Between points candidates’ task

Give examples of what to do in each stage:

– Physical:
– Relaxation:
– Preparation:
– Ritual:
During changeovers

- Sit down
- Dry off with the towel
- Drink
- Relax or activate yourself depending on your emotional state
- Use this time to adjust your equipment
- Plan ahead the tactics for the next games
After the match

• Shower
• Don’t link winning = success, losing= failure.
• Analyse the match from a positive perspective
• Get one or two ideas from each match
• Analyse the match, no matter what the score
• Write down the match characteristics
• Use visualisation to review what happened
Dealing with parents candidates’ task

Why do problems with parents occur?

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5.
Tips for coaches candidates’ task

**DO’S**

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 

**DON’TS**

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6.
## Tips for players candidates’ task

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**Tips for parents candidates’ task**

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