

MENTAL TRAINING APPLIED TO TENNIS

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I. INTRODUCTION

This article has the following goals: To define what mental training is, to show several characteristics of mental training: its components, goals and phases, and to apply some practical ideas on mental training in tennis.

2. MENTAL TRAINING

A definition of mental training can be the following: "Mental training uses psychological techniques and theories to enhance the performance and personal growth of tennis players" Williams (1984).

The main goals of mental training applied to tennis are to help players to enhance their performance, to have more fun and to be involved in extra-tennis activities.

A mental training programme should include some of the following characteristics:

- Specific goals
- Work on a group basis
- Recognise individual differences
- Be aware of the player's development
- Look for co-operation (tennis psychologist)

The phases of a mental training programme can be the following:

- Analysis of both the sport itself and the player
- Plan a specific programme for each player
- Goal setting, commitment and motivation
- Theoretical /practical work on and off court
- Final evaluation.

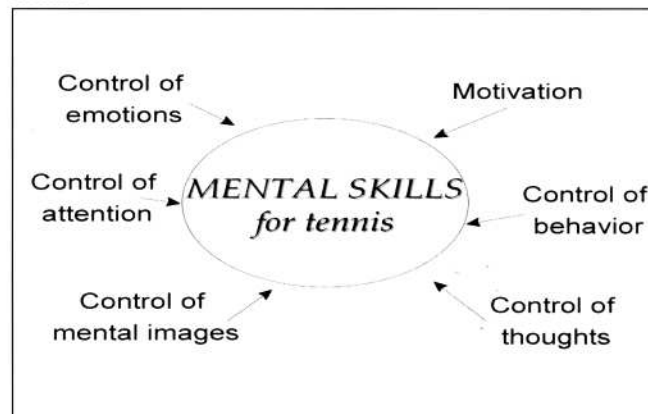
3. ANALYSIS OF THE GAME

Tennis is a mental game. Competitive tennis is 95% mental (Jimmy Connors). If a player wants to achieve top performance he needs to be mentally strong. Mental characteristics of tennis may include the following:

- 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/finish a match
- No substitutes permitted
- Knock out competition system
- Different surfaces
- Different continents
- Different types of balls
- The opponent is the umpire
- No off-season
- Ranking based on best results during different years
- No time-out decided by the player
- "Silent game" lots of concentration
- All shots are important

4. MENTAL ABILITIES AND MENTAL TECHNIQUES FOR TENNIS

The following chart includes the mental abilities needed for tennis:



The following table summarises some of the mental techniques needed for tennis:

Mental skill	Technique
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● INTRINSIC-EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION ● GOAL SETTING ● 100% EFFORT
C. emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ACTIVATION AND RELAXATION
C. attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CONCENTRATION & FOCUSING TECHNIQUES
C. thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● POSITIVE THINKING ● SELF-TALK -ATTRIBUTION
C. behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS - ROUTINES ● GESTURES
C. m. images	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● VISUALISATION - IMAGERY

5. MENTAL TRAINING MADE PRACTICAL ON COURT

When training mentally on court, the coach should use the classic drills but change the goals by introducing mental goals, i.e.: concentration, effort, emotional control, etc. Remember that the best way is through match play situations.

Which other mental aspects can be practised on court?

1. Match preparation: Pre-match routines and procedures, "psychological" warm up.
2. Training: Between points period, during points period, between games and during changeovers.
3. Evaluation and reaction after the match: analysis of the performance and the score.
4. Reactions in specific situations: external (rain, calls, etc.) and internal (Injury, etc.).

6. MENTAL TRAINING PLANNING

Planning mental training depends on the mental ability of the player, the player's general characteristics and the period of the tennis season concerned. Average mental training should include: 15 - 20 minutes per session, 2 to 3 times per week. It is also important to plan mental training drills within each technical or tactical session.

The following chart summarises what to do in each phase of the year:

STAGE	MENTAL SKILL
PREPARATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Motivation ● 100% effort ● Fun & enjoyment
PRE-COMPETITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emotional control ● Concentration ● Positive thinking
COMPETITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visualisation ● Behavioural control ● Specific match play situations
TRANSITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fun & enjoyment

7. MENTAL SKILLS IN DIFFERENT STAGES OF TENNIS

The following table summarises the main characteristics of mental skills in different stages of tennis:

BEGINNERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MOTIVATION: interesting practices ● EFFORT: strive for high quality ● ENJOYMENT: fun games and drills ● GOOD BEHAVIOUR/ SPORTSMANSHIP: rules of tennis code of conduct
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INTERMEDIATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CONCENTRATION: specific tennis drills, high mental intensity ● EMOTIONAL CONTROL: activation (mental & physical) & relaxation techniques (Jacobson or Schultz) optimal zone of performance ● THOUGHT CONTROL: positive self talk
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ADVANCED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● BEHAVIOURAL CONTROL: e.g. Loehr's 4 stages between points ● CONTROL OF MENTAL IMAGES: visualisation during tennis drills ● ON COURT "SITUATION" TRAINING: what to do mentally before, during and after the match (routines)
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8. SO WHAT?....CONCLUSIONS

When training mental skills, a coach should remember that:

Psychological skills can be learned and practised on court
Just apply mental goals to the same drills Emphasise routines
Use the C.O.M.E.T principle:

- CONCENTRATION
- MMOTIVATION
- EMOOTIONAL CONTROL
- THOUGHTS