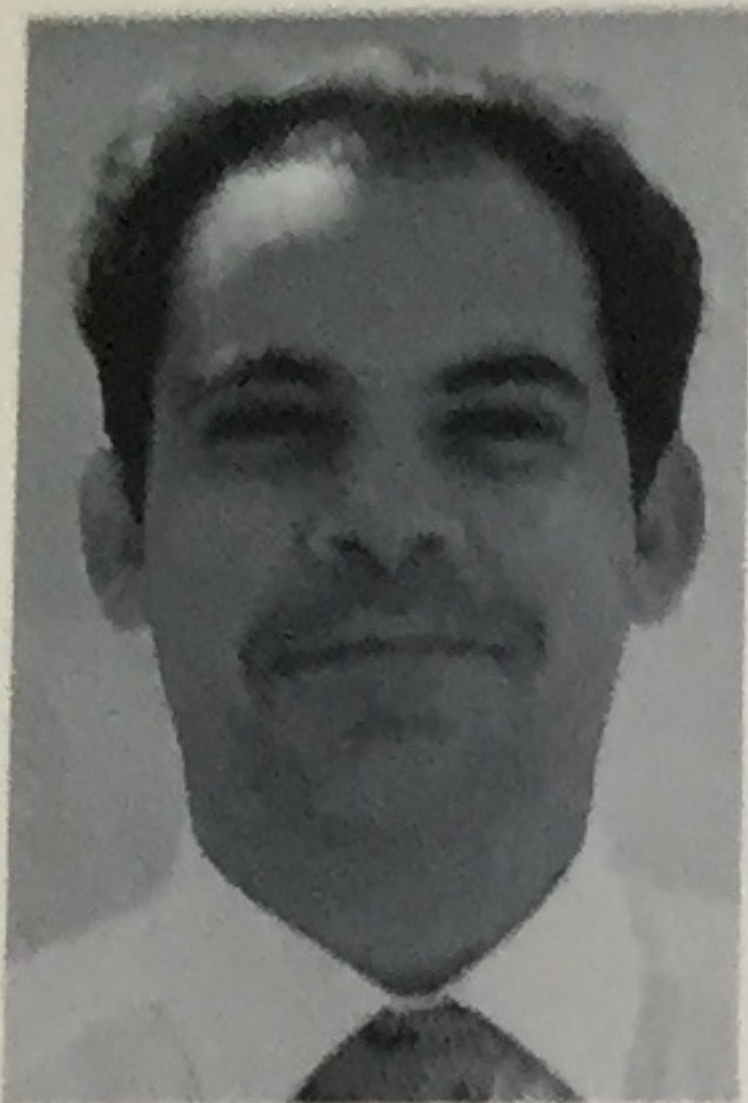




Tennis psychology: an overview and update.

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Psychology is considered to be one of the most important issues in sports sciences in relation to tennis. Areas such as motivation, concentration, emotional control, thought control and mental training have been covered in both the scientific and non-scientific literature in terms of their practical applications for competitive tennis playing and coaching.

The importance of psychological issues in tennis has always been recognised. As American champion Jimmy Connors put it in 1981: 'Tennis is 90% mental.' (Weinberg, 1988). Top coaches such as Nick Bolletieri stress that: 'The road to achieving your best - as a tennis player and as a person - is more quickly and easily travelled when you are mentally efficient' (1994).

Literature and research

The psychological demands of tennis are being addressed in an increasing number of scientific studies, examining many of the mental characteristics of actual match play. Advances in the psychological domain have given an enlightened insight to mental factors that influence the general performance and learning of tennis.

Anticipation and visual search is an area that has been subjected to extensive research. Studies have covered aspects such as the cues in preparing the return of serve (Goulet et al.), visual search and anticipation (Singer, Carraugh, Abernethy), vision and visual aids (Knudson, Miller) and timing (Isaacs, Benguigui).

Motivation and goals have also attracted the attention of researchers. Important topics in this area include goal orientation and the motivational climate (Duda, Newton, Roberts), burnout (Gould, Loehr, Kelley), motives for playing

(Balaguer) and goal setting (Weinberg, Berlant, etc).

Research into the behaviour of players and coaches has covered aspects such as inappropriate, non-verbal and touching behaviour, (Galvan, Whittaker, Heckel), coach leadership (Crespo), coach-player relationships (Prapavessis) and gender differences (Claxton, Harries, etc.).

Visualisation has been studied in areas such as video modelling (Atienza, Bouchard), audio-visual instruction (Surburg) visual analysis and video feedback (Wilkinson, Van Wieringen, Rikli, Rhea, etc.).

Attention and concentration are regarded as some of the most important factors for good tennis performance. Perceptual and attention styles (Petrakis, Van Schoyck), concentration skills (Prapavessis) and improving attention and concentration (Castiello, Moran) are among the issues studied in this area.

Studies on anxiety and stress have covered stress strategies such as relaxation and hypnosis (Coackley, Greer), stress and attention (Creff) and anxiety in juniors.

Another important area of research has been the psychological match momentum, its occurrence (Burke, Richardson), analysis (Silva), effects (Weinberg, Ransom) and differences between males and females (Weinberg).

There is an extensive volume of research into psychological routines and mental training. Aspects covered include warm-up (Anshel), routines pre, during, and post competition (Bloom, Henneman) and training programmes (Terry, Gould, Davis, Daw, Pérez).

Research on personality and gender has focused on the characteristics of professional players (De Francesco, Loehr), the relationship between personality traits and gender (Daino, Gondola, and Anderson) competitiveness as a personality trait (Houston), personality differences (Singer), intelligence (Thorpe) and mood states (Meyers, Wughalter).

Studies on motor learning have centred on cognitive strategies and expert-novice differences (McPherson), proactive interference (Eason) and learning tennis in an open and closed environment (Kessler).

Another relevant topic has been the parents of players. Studies have focused on their perceptions (De Francesco) and involvement (Hoyle). However, more research is needed, since this is a very important issue, especially at junior level.

Surprisingly, mental tennis competencies are not practised as often as technical, tactical or physical ones. The reasons for this include the incorrect belief that psychological skills are innate, the difficulty in finding sports psychologists specialising in tennis and lack of knowledge of how to teach psychological skills. Coaches may need more practical evidence and practical procedures, both on and off the court, and the opportunity to work with sport psychologists that understand the mental aspects of the game better.

Future directions and the role of the ITF

Future research into tennis psychology should aim to cover a variety of topics. It could focus on studying expert-novice and gender differences and the mental implications of combined training (i.e. psychology and tactics or technique). Other fields requiring further research are the psychological implications of burn-out, psychological aspects of periodisation, and the specific characteristics of mental training in certain age groups: juniors, adults, and professionals. Multi-disciplinary studies (including other sports sciences such as biomechanics, medicine, etc.) could also be a very interesting area of research.

Through its Development Department, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) is committed to the support of research in all fields of sports psychology and sports sciences. The ITF would like to act as a catalyst for different initiatives that will help us all to understand more about the different characteristics of a sport as exciting as tennis.

The Third European Congress of Sports Medicine and Science in Tennis

will take place in Barcelona, organised by the Real Federación Española de Tenis and the Clinico Fundació FIATC with the co-operation of the European Regional Committee of the Society for Tennis Medicine and Science.

The Third European Congress of Sports Medicine and Science in Tennis is an excellent opportunity to enhance and broaden our knowledge on the medical aspects of tennis, to exchange new ideas, and- why not?- to have some fun playing and watching excellent tennis.

For more information and registration, contact dr. Angel Ruiz-Cotorro, Co-ordinator Organizing Committee.
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We hope to see you all in Barcelona!