

ON COURT PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAINING

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1. INTRODUCTION

- **Topic contradiction:**
 - Coaches say Psychology is an important topic for tennis performance, however, it seems that it is not practised neither on-court nor off-court.
- **Why?**
 - It seems that coaches know more about technique and tactics than about psychology or physical training.
 - There are not too many Psychologists specialised on tennis.
 - Communication between coaches and psychologists should improve.
- **Way forward:**
 - Try to follow the path of physical training for tennis.
 - Early beginning: not much physical training involved in tennis.
 - Later: Physical training was done mostly off-court by specialists.
 - Current tendencies: Physical training done more on-court by tennis coaches.
- **Today's presentation:**
 - You have some psychological drills on paper.
 - Most presentations present drills according to psychological contents: motivation, concentration, emotional control, control of thoughts (as in the paper you have).
 - I have changed my mind and structured the presentation in a different way, which I think it will be more practical and straight forward.
 - So, You will have 2 presentations with the prize of 1!
 - Mental skills for tennis should be more concrete, practical and...done on court by the coach!!
 - Goal of the coach: Provide an enjoyable experience for the players.
 - Cover all aspects of tennis performance: technical, tactical, physical, mental.
 - Combine all aspects in the drills but have one main goal.
 - Characteristics of players: Adapted to the players (age, playing level, etc.).

2. INITIAL EXAMPLE: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOALS OF THE DRILL

- **Example: Serve and return of serve drill.**
 - Drill 1: Player A serves focusing on the ball toss. Player B receives focusing on contacting the ball in front.
 - Which is the goal of this drill? Mostly TECHNICAL.
 - Drill 2: Player A serves changing directions when he decides to (wide, body, T). Player B receives changing the return according to the different serves.
 - Which is the goal of this drill? Mostly TACTICAL.
 - Drill 3: Player A serves with a weighed racquet or a medicine ball. Player B receives using a weighed vest.
 - Which is the goal of this drill? Mostly PHYSICAL.
 - Could we have here a psychological drill? YES
 - Independently.
 - In conjunction with one of the drills above.
- **Initial conclusions:**
 - Drills should have a goal. In general, they have a main goal but can also have additional or secondary goals.
 - One element. By just changing one element in a drill we can shift its goal from technical to tactical, psychological or physical.
 - Coach and player: Should know which psychological skills are needed for each game situation in tennis. I.e. for the serve:
 - Knowing what to do: goal setting.

- Being focused on the task: concentration.
- Being calm: emotional control.
- Being in control, confident and positive: control of thoughts, self-confidence, positive thinking.
- Knowing what the opponent is going to do: anticipation

YOUR GO ...FILL IN SOME EXAMPLES

Mental skills needed	Strategies – Methods to improve them	Examples of drills
1. CONCENTRATION	1. FOCUSING	1. Look at the target (cones)
		2. Tell the coach where you will serve
	2. FOLLOWING ROUTINES	1. Bounce the ball a limited nr of times
		2.
2. MOTIVATION	1. COMPETITION	1.
		2.
	2. ENJOYMENT	1.
		2.
3. EMOTIONAL CONTROL	1. STRESS MANAGEMENT	1.
		2.
	2.	1.
		2.
4.	1.	1.
		2.
	2.	1.
		2.

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Game situation →	Serve, Return, Baseline game, Approach & net game, Passing the net player			
Psychological Skills →	Motivation	Emotional control	Concentration	Self-confidence
Strategy	Goal setting	Breathing - Relaxation	Occlusion	Self-talk
Drill				
Strategy	Self-competition	Breathing - Activation	Reaction	Body image
Drill				
Strategy	Competition against others	Progressive muscular relaxation	Variation	Power walk
Drill				
Strategy	Fun	Rehearsal	Focussing	Work strengths
Drill				
Strategy	100% Effort	Routines	Consistency	Visualisation
Drill				

WHAT? MENTAL TRAINING DURING THE WARM-UP? YOU MUST BE KIDDING!

Mental goal	Warm-up drill
Motivation	Relay and tag games
Concentration	Ball games
Emotional control	Racquet games
Self-confidence	Team games

MENTAL TRAINING DURING THE SESSION – EXAMPLES IN 5 GAME SITUATIONS

Mental goal	Appropriate drill
Healthy competitive atmosphere	
Adequate motivational climate	
Discipline and responsibility	
Including all the players	
Focus	
Commitment and 100% effort	
Visualisation	
Breathing	

Body language and routines	
Decision making	
Mistake management	

YOUR GO AGAIN...FILL IN SOME EXAMPLES

Mental goal	Appropriate drill
Memory	
In the zone	
Emotional control	
Positive thinking	
Sportsmanship	

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL DRILLS FOR THE DIFFERENT MATCH SITUATIONS

- **How to do this? (Lubbers, 2003)**
 - Recognize the need to improve a certain psychological skill (player psychological profile).
 - Identify the behavior needed to improve performance.
 - Practice the behaviors.
 - Receive feedback concerning how well athletes are performing the behaviors.
 - Integrate the new skills into your day-to-day on-court practice and match play.
 - Create a realistic situation, environment, atmosphere
- **Serve and return:**
 - Drill 1. Goal setting. Player A serves but before hitting the serve he should tell the coach where he is going to play it. Player B returns the serve and tells the coach where he is going to try to play it back.
 - Drill 2. Goal setting. Player A serves but before hitting the serve he should tell the coach where he is going to play it and what he will do for his second shot. Player B

returns the serve and tells the coach where he is going to try to play it back and what he will do with his second shot.

- Drill 3. Concentration. Player A serves but before hitting the serve he should use a concentration strategy: i.e. breath control by taking deep breaths. Player B returns the serve and does the same or a different psychological drill.
- Drill 4. Concentration. Player A serves but before hitting the serve he should use a concentration strategy: i.e. eye control by watching just one point (strings, court, ball). Player B returns the serve and does the same or a different psychological drill.
- Drill 5. Emotional control. Player A serves but before hitting the serve he should use an emotional control strategy: i.e. body relaxation (loosening both arms). Player B returns the serve and does the same or a different psychological drill.
- Drill 6. Emotional control. Player A serves but before hitting the serve he should use an emotional control strategy: i.e. body activation (jumping on site). Player B returns the serve and does the same or a different psychological drill.
- Drill 7. Positive thinking. Player A serves but before hitting the serve he should use a control of thoughts strategy: i.e. saying something positive (“just go for it!!”). Player B returns the serve and does the same or a different psychological drill.
- Drill 8. Positive thinking. Player A serves but before hitting the serve he should use an control of thoughts strategy: i.e. thinking to repeat a good serve he played before. Player B returns the serve and does the same or a different psychological drill.
- Drill 9. Anticipation. Player A serves but before hitting the serve he should use an anticipation strategy: i.e. looking at a cue from the opponent and serving accordingly. Player B returns the serve and does the same or a different psychological drill.
- Drill 10. Anticipation. Player A serves but before hitting the serve he should use an anticipation strategy: i.e. thinking what has happened before and serving accordingly to guess the return. Player B returns the serve and does the same or a different psychological drill. Coach will ask player if he anticipated the return based on what happened before.
- Drill 11. Anticipation. Player A serves but before hitting the serve the coach, who is located behind the receiver, points out to him the direction of the server. Player B returns the serve and has to say to which side it will go just when bouncing in the service box, just when crossing the net, just at impact, just before impact.
- Drill 12. Visual strategy (static visual sharpness). Player A serves different types of serves (flat, slice, topspin). Player B returns the serve and has to say where is he focusing to anticipate. Coach and players discuss.
- Drill 13. Visualisation/Imagery. Player A serves to several cones. Player B returns the serve to several cones also. After several minutes, the coach removes the cones and players are asked to serve and return to the cones by visualising them. Coach and players discuss afterwards.
- Drill 14. Refocusing after interruptions. Player A serves but before hitting the serve he should perform one refocusing strategy: i.e. “switch on – switch off”, “centering”, “drawing a line”. Player B returns the serve and does the same or a different psychological drill.
- Drill 15. Confidence (2nd serve and 2nd serve return). Player A serves 2nd serves but just with one ball in his hand. Player plays a match against himself with the serve. 2 double faults in a row is a game lost. Receiver also plays a match against himself with the returns of serve. Two 2nd serve returns missed in a row is a game lost.
- Drill 16. Routines. Putting everything together. Player A serves but should perform his individual routine before serving (Stage 1: Physical Response Immediately After Point Ends. Stage 2: Relaxation Response. Stage 3: Preparation Response. Stage 4: Readying Response). Player B returns the serve and does the same or a different psychological drill.
- Drill 17. Mentally dealing with exhaustion. Player A serves a given number of first serves in at the end of the training session.

- Drill 18. Concentration (playing patterns with the serve). Player A serves a given pattern (3-2-1): 3 wide, 2 body, 1 T. Receiver also plays a given pattern (3-2-1): 3 down the line, 2 centre, 1 cross court. Count how many balls are missed. Use cones for motivation.
- Drill 19. Routines. Player A serves but should perform his individual routine before serving (I go to the spot from where I will serve. I am in position and try to loose my muscles. I bounce the ball (as many times I think it is necessary), I focus and imagine the spot I want to direct my serve. I serve). Player B returns the serve with a routine (Visual: To observe the figure of the opponent. Kinesthetic: To sep your feet active. Self-talk can also be used. Motivational: Pump one's up. Instructional: With a tactical goal).
- **Baseline game:**
 - Drill 1. Psychological consistency. Players A and B rally from the baseline. Best to 100 balls over the net in a row. Everytime one player misses the ball, the balls passed in a row go to the other player.
 - Drill 2. Motivation, commitment, 100% effort. Players A, B and C rally from the baseline. Player A is alone in one side and plays cross court shots that should bounce inside the singles court, players B & C are in the other side and play down the line shots to bounce inside the alley.
 - Drill 3. Handling adversity. Players A and B rally from the baseline. They should use an emotional control technique (breathing, body relaxation, etc.) after every mistake they make.
 - Drill 4. Body image/language. Players play points from the baseline. Coach and observers look at the image each player is displaying and give extra points for good image after each point.
 - Drill 5. Eye motricity. Coach hand feeds balls to player A who is at the T and has to sprint forward and play the ball back after the second (or first) bounce. There is a shade over the net to prevent the player from watching the hand of the coach.
 - Drill 6. Visual accomodation & convergence. Players rally from the baseline with two balls at the same time.
 - Drill 7. Visual accomodation & convergence. Coach hand feeds or feeds balls very fast to player A who is at the baseline and has to play back all of them.
 - Drill 8. Emotional control. Players rally from the baseline at different speeds. 1 is very slow and 10 is very fast. Players should try to vary speeds without losing control / making mistakes.
 - Drill 9. Confidence (weapon). Coach ask players which is their best groundstroke. After that, coach feeds from the basket easy balls to each player to increase their self-confidence on that shot.
 - Drill 10. Confidence (weakness). Coach ask players which is the groundstroke they have to practice more and in which they have less self-confidence. After that, coach feeds from the basket easy balls to each player to increase their self-confidence on that shot.
 - Drill 11. Concentration (staying here and now). Players play points from the baseline with no serve. Before each point one player each time has to say the score in loud voice.
 - Drill 12. Goal setting. Coach feeds from the basket to players at the baseline. Instead of: "Let's play 5 good forehands or I will feed Fhs until the basket is empty", the goal is: "How many balls do you need to play 5 very good forehands...or to knock down the can/target?" Players should say how many they need before starting the drill.
 - Drill 13. Handling pressure. Players play points. Use different scores: 40-15, 15-40, 0-30, etc.
 - Drill 14. Fighting spirit. Coach feeds from the basket or 2 against 1 drill. Very tough and at the end, an easy ball for the player to kill it...if he can!!
 - Drill 15. Momentum. Players play points up to 21. When someone wins 3 points in a row, he has won the match.

- Drill 16. Concentration. Hit-bounce-hit drill. Players rally and should say: “Hit” when the opponent hits the ball, “Bounce” when the ball bounces in the court and “Hit” when the opponent hits the ball.
- Drill 17. Concentration-visual. Hit-bounce-hit drill. But players play wearing an eye shade. So they do not see the ball.
- Drill 18. Concentration-auditory. Hit-bounce-hit drill. But players play wearing ear plugs. So they do not hear the ball.
- Drill 19. Concentration-visual/auditory. Hit-bounce-hit drill. But players play wearing eye shades and ear plugs. So they do not hear nor see the ball.

- **Playing at the net and passing the net player**
 - Drill 1. Goal: Visual strategy (dynamic visual sharpness). Player A is at the net and player B at the baseline. Player A tries to anticipate player B’s passings. He has to say where is he focusing to anticipate. Coach and players discuss.
 - Drill 2. Goal: Visual accomodation & convergence. Player A is at the net and player B at the baseline. Players rally but from now and then, the coach feeds a ball to the player at the net who has to play it back to a target without missing the ball he is rallying with his partner.
 - Drill 3. Confidence (easy smashes). Coach feeds easy lobs for players to smash 5 lobs in a row. Set up a competition between both players.
 - Drill 4. Confidence (Yes drill). Coach feeds balls to players at the net. They should volley and say: “yes” after each good volley they have played. Can be done with players rallying and with other strokes.
 - Drill 5. Confidence (Time drill). Coach feeds balls to players at the net. Coach feeds from the basket to players at the baseline. Instead of: “Let’s play 5 good forehands or I will feed Fhs until the basket is empty”, the goal is: “How many balls do you need to play 5 very good forehands...or to knock down the can/target?”. Players should say how many they need before starting the drill.
 - Drill 6. Confidence (when to stop drill). Coach feeds balls to players at the net. Coach asks players to play good volleys. He will stop when the volley is good and will give positive feedback to the players. He will feed when the volley could be better.

- **Match play situations**
 - Drill 1. Pre-match mental routines. Players play a tie-break or a set but before that they should follow an individual routine (for practice matches sessions).
 - Drill 2. During-match mental routines. Players play a tie-break or a set but during the change overs should follow an individual routine (for practice matches sessions).
 - Drill 3. Under pressure situations - shots. Players play points but are only allowed to have a 2nd serve and score starts 40-15, 15-40, etc.
 - Drill 4. Under pressure situations - mistakes. Players play points but mistakes at the net are penalised with 2 points.
 - Drill 5. Under pressure situations - shots. Players play points but are only allowed to play with one groundstroke.
 - Drill 6. Under pressure situations - shots. Players play points but are only allowed to win points at the net.
 - Drill 7. Under pressure situations – mistake management. Players play points. After a mistake at the end of the point they should use a *self-tak* strategy to refocus be emotionally under control:
 - Say a positive statement several times.
 - Internally sing a favourite song.
 - Count up to 10.
 - Drill 8. Under pressure situations - mistake management. Players play points. After a mistake at the end of the point they should use a *emotional control* strategy to refocus be emotionally under control:
 - Loosen the muscles.
 - Activate the body.

- Use breathing.
- Drill 9. Under pressure situations - mistake management. Players play points. After a mistake at the end of the point they should use a *positive body image* strategy to refocus be emotionally under control:
 - Head and shoulders up.
 - Power walk.
 - Rehearse the stroke missed.
 - Change racquet to non-playing hand.
- Drill 10. Confidence. Players play points. Acting 'as if'. Players alternate between acting confident and acting unconfident. From point-to-point, from game-to-game.
- Drill 11. Confidence. Players play points. Players have an equal number of small pieces of paper in each pocket. For each time they talk to themselves positively he/she places a piece of paper from the 'negative pocket' to the 'positive pocket'. For every time he/she talks to themselves negatively he/she takes a piece of paper from the positive pocket to the negative pocket. The idea is to have a pre-decided number of pieces of paper in the 'positive pocket'.
- Drill 12. Confidence. Players play points. Player has to decide upon a positive phrase to say to him/herself within the first three seconds of the point finishing and then attempt to repeat that phrase to herself for as long as she can sustain it.
- Drill 13. Mental readiness. Players play points. Players only allowed to start the next point when they are ready i.e. when they are emotionally ready – when they have baked their emotional cake. Almost like a cheque routine that pilot and co-pilot do before take-off – “fuel”, “check”, etc. Player does similarly, e.g. “confidence – check, energy level – check”, etc. Intermittently ask players to tell you what their self-talk was prior to starting the point.
- Drill 14. Mental toughness. Players play points. Coach asks the players to give themselves a mark out of 10 for how hard they are working. Then ask the player why they are at x out of 10 and not a lower number.
- Drill 15. Positive thinking. Players play points. Player states three things about his routine that are observable – coach and/or opponent can deduct a point from a player if he has not been seen to complete his routine.
- Drill 16. Momentum. Players play points. Player who wins 3 points in a row, wins the game.
- Drill 17. Environment. Players play points:
 - Windy day.
 - Very hot/cold environment.
 - Bad quality court/balls.
- Drill 18. Self/analysis. Players play points. Winner Assess the Rally (WAR) /Loser Assess the Rally (LAR). They award points according to their assessment.
- Drill 19. Under pressure situations - mistake management - memory. Players play points. After a mistake at the end of the point the coach will ask the players about the points and they should tell the coach how they played the point using memory to manage mistake and learn for mistakes.
- Drill 20. Under pressure situations - mistake management – mental rehearsal. Players play points. After a mistake at the end of the point the coach will ask the players about the points and they should tell the coach previous situations which were similar or different. Emphasising winning or positive performances of the players.
- Drill 21. Under pressure situations - mistake management – recognising negative situations. Players play points. After a mistake at the end of the point the coach will ask the players about the negative aspects of the point and how they recognised them.
- Drill 22. Under pressure situations - mistake management – recognising positive situations. Players play points. After a mistake at the end of the point the coach will ask the players about the positive aspects of the point and how they recognised them.

- Drill 23. Under pressure situations - mistake management – recognising shot breakdown/playing against a player without a stroke. Players play points but one player is only allowed to serve underarm so that they have to play honestly and simulates the situation of playing a match when one of the major parts of your game is not working.
- Drill 24. Under pressure situations – fighting spirit. Psychological Warfare drill called 'head to head' – players play points against each other but are constantly looking to collect bonus points from their opponent by identifying chinks in their mental armour. This may be lack of a fighting image due to poor body language, or negative self-talk indicating frustration, worry and or self doubt.
- Drill 25. Under pressure situations – confidence. Players play points against each other but coach stops points immediately after good play by the player, so that the point does not have to end on an unforced error, which it invariably does with young developing players.
- Drill 26. Under pressure situations – confidence- court talk. Players play points against each other and they are allowed to say what they are thinking to the coach at certain times.

4. CONCLUSION

- Mental drills can and should be applied in on-court training sessions.
- Coaches need to use their imagination and go for it.
- Good luck!

REFERENCES

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