



# Creativity on court I: Felt visualization

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## ABSTRACT

This article provides two examples of imagined practice, laying emphasis on the feelings that accompany visualization (quality of the image, sounds or feelings) as a way of enhancing the efficiency of this tool. Some practical tips are provided about their application.

**Key words:** Imagined practice, visualization, sensations, exercises

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## INTRODUCTION

"Imagination is more important than knowledge" (Albert Einstein).

"I believe in the power of the mind and visualization, which is a big part of my everyday life." (Novak Djokovic)

Imagined practice, more commonly known as visualization, refers to the use of senses to recreate or create an experience in the mind (Vealey & Greenleaf, 2001). This resource, which has been recognized in the sport context for a long time (Cox, 2009), has not been systematically used in proportion to this recognition.

The power of imagined practice is huge due to its capacity to reproduce, at brain level, the neurologic routes we would go along if we performed the situation in reality (Fisher, 1986). Among its benefits, it is suggested that imagined practice can improve confidence, the learning process, reduce the number of errors, reduce anxiety or facilitate injury rehab (Crespo, Reid & Quinn, 2006), and facilitate technical improvement (Guillot, Desliens, Rouyer, & Rogowski, 2013).

This article intends to provide the image with all senses, laying special emphasis on physical sensations, sound quality, and above all...emotions, in short, to make a sensed visualization, connecting with the emotion, just as it will be felt when the proposed target is achieved. Experiencing the emotion will provide more credibility to our brain, and its materialization in the real level will be more intensely encouraged by means of the virtual experience.

## PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Can any player visualize?

Those who have competed know what it is like to spend the whole night imagining possible scenarios, related to the match the next day, to the tournament... Have you ever imagined your opponent hitting extremely accurate strokes, with an incredible power and a supernatural elegance? This is the best proof that we all visualize, the key is to make it voluntarily, consciously and driven to our targets, and to avoid making it unconsciously, reactively, and as a result of tension.

One of the most important aspects to consider, to increase its effectiveness, are the preferred perception channels, that is, the increased ease to "see", "hear" or "feel". Anyway, and apart from this perception channel, all can be achieved with proper training.



## How to start

Since we tend to remember more easily those situations which are similar to those of our emotional state (Fernández-Abascal, Jiménez Sánchez, Martín Díaz, & Domínguez Sánchez, 2010), it is convenient to make sure that our player is in an optimal mood, as regards confidence and satisfaction. We are, thus, facilitating the connection with other moments of confidence and achievement in which he made similar changes.

## Basic guidelines

Related to content: If you expect to incorporate a new technical movement, one possibility is to connect directly with the feelings and the projection of the image. If we expect to elicit a state, it is recommended to make a visual warming-up (breathing), a principal (technique) and a final part.

In relation to speed and duration: It will depend on the target and the environment. If we are doing an on-court exercise, it will be good to make a direct and fast imagined practice, imagining the technical movement, eliciting the desired state according to the objective, and characteristics of our player. If, on the contrary, we are at the initial stage of the change/learning, it is convenient to take enough time for the brain to integrate the new modifications, recreating in the movement, and especially, in the feelings.

In movement? With or without a racket? The follow-through with the racket is particularly recommended in intermediate players, with some technical knowledge, but it is not so in higher level players (Mizuguchi, Takahiro, Nakata, & Kanosue, 2015). Our suggestion is to try and give the player the possibility to determine the most effective way.

## EXERCISES:

The following are examples of imagined practice, so that as a coach, you use them according to the player's needs and general situation. It is key to try them ourselves, before we try them with others, so as to be familiar with the feelings, the times, the tone of voice... In short, your will have a better capacity to connect with your emotions, as well as those of your player.

### I. Capture the feeling of the stroke

1. Make a series of 15 strokes on court. Just observe and be aware of your sensations.
2. Then, just close your eyes for a moment and concentrate your attention on your body feelings.

3. For a moment, let the stroke provide the information that is necessary (point of impact, timing, touch, body weight, body attitude, intensity, sound, position of the free hand, contraction of the trunk...). Let the stroke tell you what is necessary. You can ask yourself: in order to be more fluid, direct, natural, firm, what is necessary? Take a minute to capture this.

4. Now, observe internally and feel the stroke, just as it should be: first the sensation, then its firmness, how it flows, being aware of the bodyweight, first on one foot, then on the other one... And even observe how the ball leaves your racket, its direction...

5. Last, without thinking or verbalizing, finish the exercise, being aware of how your body integrates now, and later, the most convenient modifications.

### Suggestions

- Duration and place: 3-5 minutes, on court.
- The key is not to judge the gesture as "right/wrong", it is just on the observation of what happens.
- With practice and perseverance, the observation will become something natural and will help modifications and the learning processes.
- Exercise inspired on Gallwey (1997)

Table 1. Suggestions for exercise 1.

## II. Intensify a state: Determination

"I doubt, I do not think I am sure of myself... But my head lets me play with determination in important moments, moments of pressure..." (Rafael Nadal)

1. Bring to your memory a situation in which you experienced great courage while playing... courage and conviction, accurately.
2. Observe yourself: your shoulders, your head up, look ahead, safe steps... feel your movements, the intensity of your legs and your heart, quick, strong. Be also conscious of your intense and centred breathing, that provides energy each time you inhale, and unloads the unnecessary, when you exhale... Let this inspiration create the right stroke each time (...)
3. Zoom in your mental image, as if you had a zoom, and as if you could change it at will. Zoom in a little bit more,...that is right... very good... now make it a bit bigger. Observe when the image gets more intense and gives you better sensations

(...) then, fix it. Do the same with the clarity of the image: at times, increase (or decrease) its colour, its brightness, its accuracy ...choosing an image you are totally at ease with, determined.

4. Now, the sounds: listen to the perfect impact of the ball on your racket, be also aware of the sound you make when you hit the ball, the sound the player you are playing with makes, ...the sounds outside ...Increase (or reduce) the volume of what you want, maybe you want it louder, deeper, determined... Make the adjustments, this way... Your way... Until they are perfect for you.



5. Now feel which is the gesture that you make which connects you with the courage and determination you are feeling at this time (in case you have none, it is the right moment to start) Correct... Be aware of what you tell yourself, a word or phrase that captures the sensation....?

6. Remain like this for a moment (1- 2 min).

7. When you are ready, come again to this court and open your eyes.

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| <p><b>Suggestions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Duration and place: 5 -7 minutes, on court.</li> <li>- When the player is familiar, the time tends to be shorter.</li> <li>- Once the anchorage is set (gesture, words...) repeat it constantly at each training session. The more it is repeated, the more effective and the faster the player will connect with the sensation induced. Within several weeks, it will be enough to activate the anchorage (make the gesture, repeat the word or phrase) to connect with the sensations.</li> </ul> |
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Table 2. Suggestions for exercise.

### THE OTHER SIDE OF IMAGINED PRACTICE

At times, imagined practice may be counterproductive. The loss of confidence makes the player suffer different

consequences that impact on the effectiveness of the strategies to improve. When a player finds himself in a limiting situation they will often find it difficult to connect with the desired situation or state, they will find it tough to imagine or re-live, resulting in a feeling of frustration, totally opposed to the objective expected. In these situations, it is recommended to guide the player to modify the emotions (by means of a talk, relaxation, remembering a memory, etc.) and then, to make the practice, or else, disregard the exercise temporarily.

### CONCLUSION

The only way to make sure of the reach of the benefits of imagined practice is just by means of its application. We suggest you should practise in a conscious way targeting the objectives, and improvements will start in no time, you will also improve complementary aspects which are key for performance, such as concentration, emotional regulation, or control of your thoughts. Table 3 provides a summary of the main aspects in this article, as well as an exercise you can immediately start using with your players.

Remember Einstein’s words: “if you want different results, do not do the same all the time”. Enlarge your resources toolbox, as a coach by means of simple, realistic and efficient visualization that will make players, and you as a coach, notice the difference.

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| <p><b>3 Keys</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More practice, more effectiveness</li> <li>- Practice, first, with yourself.</li> <li>- Individualize practice, design custom made outfits for your players..</li> </ul> <p><b>1 Exercise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Get used to visualizing at the beginning, what the sensations will be like, once the training is over.</li> </ul> |
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Table 3. Practical application keys.

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