



Empowering players to deal with expectations.

Janet A Young.

Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia.

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the concept of 'expectations'. The approaches adopted by Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, Andy Murray and Roger Federer in response to expectations for them to perform well at Wimbledon are discussed. Strategies for players to deal with expectations and the role of the coach are highlighted.

Key words: Expectations, Role of coach.

Received: 3 June 2013

Accepted: 2 September 2013

Corresponding author: Janet A Young, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia.

Email: janet_young7@yahoo.com.au

INTRODUCTION

The role of a coach extends beyond simply providing technical instruction (Crespo et al. 2006). Rather, the role of a coach is an exacting one where he/she is expected to guide players to reach goals, enjoy the game and do their best in competition and training. To this end coaches may find themselves having to work with players who are overcome with the burden of expectations of others and their own expectations of themselves. This can easily occur when players are expected to win because of their high rankings or past performances. Players feel pressured because of the expectations to perform well. This can be a most disruptive and unnerving experience for many players who find it difficult to concentrate on what really needs to be done in a match.

So what might a coach do to guide a player who feels the weight of expectations on their shoulders? This paper addresses this question by reviewing the approaches adopted by four tennis champions in response to the expectations that they would do well at the recently conducted 2012 Wimbledon Championship. But first, let's understand what expectations are and why they are important.

WHAT ARE EXPECTATIONS?

Expectations are the anticipated outcome of a situation (Vandenbos, 2009). In tennis, they reflect beliefs – of players themselves, other players, support persons, coaches and media for example - about performance and match outcomes. Expectations are thought to generally arise from a player having ability and talent and a track record of some previous success. As noted some 50 years ago, accomplishments carry

the burden of expectation. "The laurel wreath has in it the prickly reminder that more is expected of the wearer"(Bronk, 1962. p.170).

Expectations can be unrealistic in some instances. Irrespective of this, what is important is how the person perceives and interprets the expectation(s). Such perceptions and interpretations can have a direct effect on a player's confidence, concentration and general health and wellbeing (Young, 2008).

LESSONS FROM CHAMPIONS

Valuable insights can be gleaned from four of our great champions who were asked to reflect on the expectations they faced in competing in the 2012 Wimbledon Championships. The players were Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, Andy Murray and Roger Federer.

In the case of Nadal, he entered Wimbledon fresh from winning an historic French Open Championship and was a former Wimbledon champion. Djokovic was the reigning Wimbledon Champion and the current top world ranked player. Murray was the darling of the British crowd who desperately wanted the long drought since the last British Wimbledon champion (Fred Perry in 1936) to end. Roger Federer was a former Wimbledon Champion who was attempting to achieve an historical number of Wimbledon singles titles.

There were huge expectations of all four champions and each player has provided us with a glimpse of their strategies and mindset for dealing with the expectations. Specifically,



A. Nadal's response to the expectation for him to win Wimbledon included,

"Thinking about winning another title here in Wimbledon is arrogant and crazy. That's something I cannot think about. I can just think about practice, preparing my game and being competitive to try to win each match"

(Wimbledon Interviews, 2012).

B. Djokovic's response to the expectation for him to defend his Wimbledon title included,

"I am not trying to defend my title here. I'm trying to fight for it as every other player. My mindset is very positive ... It is not the first time that I am playing to win or lose a ranking. It is not something that I think about too much. I really just want to focus on the match"

(Wimbledon Interviews, 2012).



C. Murray's response to his country's expectation for him to win Wimbledon included,

"There is obviously pressure there. I think if you think too much about it, and what you read in the newspapers and you watch the stuff on TV that's said about you, I think it would become too much. But if you shield yourself from it all and get into your own bubble, only listen to the people that you have around you, then it is something you can deal with"

(Wimbledon Interviews, 2012).



D. Federer's response to the expectation of winning an historic number of Wimbledon singles titles included,



"Of course there's a lot on the line for me. I'm not denying that. I have a lot of pressure but I'm look forward to that. That's what I work hard for. I've worked extremely hard since I lost that match point against Novak (Djokovic) last year at the US Open. My run has been extremely good. Now I have a chance at the

world No.1 so it's a big match for me and I hope I can keep my nerves. I'm sure I can"

(Wimbledon Interviews, 2012).

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH EXPECTATIONS

Each of the champions – Nadal, Djokovic, Murray and Federer - faced significant and diverse expectations at the 2012 Wimbledon Championships. Each viewed such expectations as 'normal' situations that required a focused and disciplined response.

The responses from the champions highlight a number of possible strategies for players to adopt to deal with expectations including:

- Refrain from thinking, hearing or reading about expectations relating to your performance.
- Surround yourself with a positive support team who believe in you and can shield you from expectations from others and any media coverage of your matches.
- Put all your attention into preparing well for matches and being as competitive as possible in these matches.
- Divert or redirect your attention away from the expectations by focusing on playing each and every point in a match to the very best of your ability.
- View expectations as a reward for doing well. Accept that there is pressure associated with expectations but this is something you have worked for and, consequently, it is a privilege to be in a situation where there are expectations for you to perform well.

It is noted that these strategies need to be tailored to the individual player. What will work for one player might be quite different for others. The choice of strategy, or combination of strategies, will depend on 'what works' for that player. Do they feel better about their game and can they focus better on playing the points under pressure as a result of adopting one or more of these strategies?

ROLE OF THE COACH

A coach can play a critical role in guiding players to understand and, in fact, appreciate the significance of expectations. While each player is unique, and an individual approach is recommended, coaches can empower players to develop their strengths to embrace expectations as positive outcomes for hard work and success. Expectations are to be expected when a player has done well and worked hard at their game. They are a reflection of what is possible and what remains yet to be

achieved. In this context, expectations can be a positive driving force in a player's development.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, a coach is continually looking for ways to create opportunities for players to develop their abilities. The illustration of the four champions' responses to expectations in this paper suggests that other players may well have the resources and capabilities to effectively manage expectations. Coaches can encourage players to discuss and evaluate the expectations that the player face. Sometimes a player's own expectations about their performance can be very negative and discouraging even when others have positive expectations. Given that a player's own perception of his/ her prospects and abilities is by far the most important perspective, players need this to be constructive, positive and encouraging.

Players need to be aware that their coach expects them to competently manage, and even embrace, expectations because they have previously demonstrated the ability to effectively do so. It is this expectation that can make a vital difference to a player's development and enjoyment of the game!

REFERENCES

- Bronk, D.W. (1962). The burden of expectation. *Science News Letter*; 81,11:170- 172.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3944702>
- Crespo, M., Reid, M. & Quinn, A. (2006). *Tennis Psychology: 200+ practical drills and the latest research*. London, International Tennis Federation.
- Vandenbos, R. (2009). *APA Concise Dictionary of Psychology*. Washington: Am Psych Assoc.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1chs9c9.3>
- Wimbledon (2012). Interviews. Retrieved from http://www.wimbledon.com/en_GB/news/interviews/index.html
- Young, J.A. (2008). Coach, can you help me to be mentally tough? *ITF Coaching Sport Science Rev.*; 44:2-4.

RECOMMENDED ITF TENNIS ACADEMY CONTENT (CLICK BELOW)



Copyright (c) 2013 Janet A Young.



This text is under a [Creative Commons BY 4.0 license](#)

You are free to Share - copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format - and Adapt the content - remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially under the following terms:

Attribution: You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

[CC BY 4.0 license terms summary](#) [CC BY 4.0 license terms](#)