



A guide to a new mentality: Mindset in a nutshell.

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the 'Mindset' approach to the mental game of tennis. The article introduces the concept of Mindset, the philosophy and the six pillars upon which this mind set is grounded. It also provides insight into how to develop a positive mental attitude- 'Mindset' and with it guidelines for self-betterment on and off the court.

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INTRODUCTION

The philosophy

All around us, there are signs of a movement away from the lifestyle and way of thinking that are associated with the rat race towards a more conscious way of living and thinking. Mindfulness, slowing down the pace of life and stress management are all terms that no longer sound vague or esoteric.

We call the traditional mentality of judging, rationalizing and attachment to the past and the future 'story thinking'. The new way of thinking that Mindset advocates is governed by observing non-judgmentally, visualizing and focusing on the here and now. We call this balanced mindset 'action thinking'.

By changing your mindset, you will get the best out of yourself, and you will find yourself able to do far more than before with the same level of skill. Getting into a flow is within anyone's reach, provided you know what to focus on. Mindset is a mental guide that teaches you to change from story thinking into action thinking. You will learn how to be in the here and now, and to conquer the interference coming from the ego. Winning from yourself will become more important than winning from your opponent. Once you have mastered this way of thinking, you will always be able to give your best performance.

Someone who could serve as a good role model to everyone in this respect is Roger Federer. He says that in the course of his career he has increasingly learned how to relax and how to play one point at a time. He states quite literally that he finds it more important to outperform himself than his opponents.

Other sportsmen in whom he recognizes the same mentality include the amazing tennis icon Pete Sampras and the Formula One racing driver Michael Schumacher. In all three cases, their success comes from a constant drive to perform at a higher level rather than to win from an opponent. They have learned to improve their own concentration to a level at which their achievements derive almost entirely from action thinking rather than story thinking. Of course, it hardly needs to be added that it is also their natural talent, self-discipline and determination that have made them better than the rest.

Developing mindset

In general we tend to resist change, because our usual patterns feel comfortable; changing patterns requires energy and effort, and is sometimes painful. We are always searching for excuses to avoid change. The only way of changing old patterns into new ones is through practice and repetition. Every day you practise means progress. This is an essential element of the Mindset philosophy. Shifting from story to action thinking does not mean that we have to turn our thoughts off altogether, it means finding new patterns to help us switch off the 'noise' of story thinking. Only then can we learn how to focus to the best of our ability.

In story thinking, there is a big difference between winning and losing; the result is quite obviously either one or the other. Action thinking makes it possible to win every time. If you are bogged down in story thinking, you have simply won or lost, in sports terms, according to the scoreboard. In action thinking you can win twice: from yourself, and in addition, sometimes from your opponent too. You win from yourself if you set realistic goals for yourself beforehand, in a match as well as in

a training session, and achieve them by carrying out your plan consistently and with discipline. You will learn to experience this as a victory. Eventually you will start to realize that winning from yourself is more important than winning from your opponent. And with this attitude will come a new feeling of self-confidence.

'My only goal is to win this match.' This is something you will hear sports people of all levels say more frequently than almost anything else. And the funny thing about this statement is that it essentially has no content at all. This winning does not serve any goal, no specific plan has been mapped out that can be worked on, it does not provide any guidelines as to what you hope to achieve, and all it does is add tension.

METHOD

The aim of Mindset is to provide a method that will enable people to develop mental resilience both in matches and in other situations. The method aims at consciousness-raising, with the ultimate aim of acting unconsciously. Eventually you learn to act on the basis of feeling and intuition.

The balanced Mindset of action thinking is attained by working on both attention control – the four concentrations (zoom, scan, feeling and thought) and the six pillars. The concentrations and the pillars are as the wings of a bird; if one of them doesn't work, the bird cannot fly. In this paper we only have room to deal with the six pillars.

We regard these six pillars as universally applicable.

The six pillars

1. Friendly eyes
2. Good mistakes
3. Curiosity
4. Self-knowledge
5. Self-discipline
6. Acceptance

1. Friendly eyes

Friendly eyes and good mistakes are the two most important 'pillars' on which to base your development as an action thinker. They are the foundation of achieving a balanced mind. If you look with friendly eyes, objectively and non-judgmentally – not just at yourself but also at the world around you – emotions will lose their power over you. This will make you less vulnerable, since you will not take everything personally. Here

is an example: 'If my opponent tries to disrupt my game with intimidating comments or behaviour, I shall not get irritated or see it as a personal attack. I will not let it influence me. In fact I can even understand why he or she might act that way.' Another example: 'If I get furious with myself for playing way below my standard, I will understand that I am doing the best I can at this given moment.' 'Friendly eyes' is a state of mind that every sportsman should pursue.



2. Good mistakes

If you boldly pursue a specific goal, you may not succeed straight away. In fact it would be quite odd if you did not make a few mistakes along the way, before you succeed in making a change successful and permanent. If someone walks off the court or field in disappointment after losing a match, he may deal with the defeat in two different ways. He can learn from what happened, seeing the match as a 'good mistake'. He can remind himself that progress is not always immediately visible and carry on optimistically down the path of personal development. Or he can look at the defeat as a personal disaster, which will close off ways of learning from it and make progress impossible. 'Good mistakes' is a way of reasoning that makes every situation a learning experience.

3. Curiosity

If you are curious about how you behave on and off the sports field, you will gather information to help you enhance your performance. This curiosity may be about how you are playing, and how your opponent is playing, but also about the emotions that come to the surface. Self-management begins with curiosity, and this includes open questions. For example asking your coach: 'What do you think the best way is for me to improve mentally?' The brain can be trained, just like a muscle. So curiosity is very valuable, since it leads to new discoveries that can help you to make changes. Once you realize this, there is no longer any such thing as failure. 'Good' and 'bad' become meaningless concepts: there is just scope for growth. Curiosity leads to self-knowledge.

4. Self-knowledge

Self-knowledge grows through shared knowledge. Self-knowledge does not only come from solitary reflection; more importantly, it comes from asking for open, honest feedback, for instance from your coach or team-mates. Self-knowledge will always remain limited if you are not open to the opinions of others.

Self-knowledge is an essential part of setting goals, since you need to know what is within your own capabilities. Everyone who is involved in sport needs to set a mental goal as well as setting goals in technique, tactics and fitness. It is crucial to choose a goal that is specific and achievable. What exactly are you demanding of yourself, why, and how are you going to go about it? From this situation you can really start changing things to your advantage.

5. Self-discipline

Letting go of old patterns creates space for change. Deploying new patterns calls for self-discipline, for which patience is absolutely essential. We all realize this, but how do we muster the energy to remain disciplined when the going gets tough? Reflecting on a daily basis about what you want to change and what your long and short term goals are, will motivate you to carry on. Realising what value this change will bring can make self-discipline a pleasure. We feel the need to emphasize that self-discipline is the only real discipline. The sportsman needs to find the fire from within himself, only then can a real change take place. The fact that you are doing everything that is within your power, gives you the fuel to continue and produces the beginnings of acceptance.

6. Acceptance

Once you are aware of what you need to work on and accept this, there will be more space to focus on your strengths. You can use your energy to focus on the positive instead of fighting the negative. This generates a sense of calm, as a result of which your self-confidence will grow. You will be more appreciative of your efforts, which will diminish frustrations and fears and increase your enjoyment. Your self-respect too will

be boosted. This will improve your performance and make you into a more balanced player.

CONCLUSION

Mindset uses a concrete, simple, modern and accessible vocabulary. The terminology is neutral and objective rather than confrontational. This allows changes in mentality to be welcomed and motivating, instead of being resisted by pupils and players. Mindset provides sport coaches with a general framework for communication with their pupils, using one or two words instead of complex sentences. The philosophy deals with a number of tennis specific issues, including dealing with bad line calls, choosing a correct coach, tactics and self-discipline that will improve the player and person, both on and off the court.

REFERENCES

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