Preparing and evaluating a tennis match.

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ABSTRACT
Tennis is a psychologically demanding sport and it is necessary to encourage players’ responsibility and independence from very early stages. This article discusses the active role of the player when preparing an optimal and orderly routine for a match, followed by a competition plan as well as a rigorous match analysis. This way, players will be encouraged to consider lost matches as a possibility to learn from their mistakes, thus, avoiding the frustration of defeat.

INTRODUCTION
When observing the 15 and under matches at the Catalonia Championship in Spain, many of my players told me it was one of the most important competitions in the season. Much to my surprise, I noticed that such an important event had received little preparation on the part of the players. This lack of preparation will inevitably have an impact on the results of a player in the long run.

One of the players was wearing his eldest brother’s tennis shoes because he had left his at home. On the next court, in mid July, another player was looking for a player not on court to go and get some water since there was no other source in the area. Her opponent was waiting for her mother to get a cap from the car. At the same time, yet another player rushed into the court without warming up because she had miscalculated the distance to the club when she left her home... What can we conclude then, after all these situations? That the match does not start with the first point but it starts with the training session the week before, and ends with that of the week after.

THE PREPARATION PROCESS
One of the most important aspects to improve as a tennis player is to avoid parents’ overprotection and to make the player self sufficient and responsible for his matches for, unlike other sports, the tennis player is “on his own when facing danger”. So, both coaches and players must use a competition plan which can be similar to the one attached in this article. This plan will allow for optimal preparation for a match, and will also allow the match to develop according to that plan, and also allow for analysis and reflection afterward.

18 and under players will often strive to perfect their strokes during training sessions from Monday to Friday, hitting an innumerable amount of balls which are fed at a speed and distance from a basket, much unlike those of a match. During the weekend matches, all the weaknesses that should be polished for the next match or during the season come to light. In a nutshell, the coach and player must learn how to understand failure to turn it into success through the matchplay process.

However, quite often the player will switch off after the competition and will forget about the match, in order to rest and resume the training routine on Monday with basket feeding... but, what about those technical errors, those mental lapses, those bad tactical decisions or that poor physical condition during the match? Will all that be forgotten? In short, the player will have spent long hours on court during the season, but, it is likely that not all of them will be quality hours that will foster optimal progression as a tennis player.

This article includes a match self-evaluation, which players must fill in themselves once the match is over in order to note errors as well as progress, by means of an analysis of the main psychological aspects; motivation, confidence, concentration and control of arousal during the different sets. They will also rate their physical condition and their different strokes between 0 and 10 considering the use of technique during the match and reflecting on how they have handled these problems during match play. This evaluation will lay emphasis on the performance goals for each match, so that the player can use the best practices he has tried to improve during the week. Performance goals can be layed out in the competition plan, on the following page.
**Figure 1. Example match evaluation form.**

**Table 1. Competition plan.**

| Equipment | It is your office, make sure there is nothing missing. Racquets, outfit, energy food, water, first aid kit, money, shampoo, cocoa butter, kleenex, sun screen, grips, and vibration dampeners, paper/ pencil, sun glasses, towel, hat, contact lenses, clips, no3, gloves, magazine. |
| Diet and hydration | Complex carbohydrates, pasta, cereals, bread, fruit. More than 1.5L fluid per match (Always drink to prevent a dry mouth, hydrate before you feel thirsty). |
| Warming up | If you want peace, get ready for war. Static: 20s x 3 Gastrocnemius, abductors, ischiotibialis, gluteus, quadriceps, biceps, forearms. Dynamic: Continuous run, warming up, rope jumping, line sprints. Mental: music, breathe and be cool. |
| React (The three Ps) | Recover: dry my sweat, drink, eat and breathe slowly. |
| Routine between points | Think easy...play easy! 1. Positive physical response (if I am winning) and connection + shadow (if I am losing). 2. Disconnect: recover (breathe deeply, take the towel, watch the strings...). 3. Connect: I encourage myself, follow my service! return routine to concentrate. |
| Match situations, reading the match | If flouting: Tense has streaks, react and do something. The turtle: slow down during change overs; change your game and your shirt, sit down, feel fresh like a new player, tie your laces, lie patient and attack with your favourite strokes to gain confidence. When its even: EXHIBIT YOUR POWER: Use your attitude and movements to show your guts, head and fitness. You don’t only win using your tennis. If winning; if you do not beat him, he will beat you! Keep your intensity. You win the 1st set and you are in trouble; you have hurt the bear that will react and attack; go all out in the 2nd set to kill. You’ve got him! How shall I close the match? Like a snake with fast poisoned movements (winners), or like a boa constrictor choking your opponent with consistent matchplay. Important points: (20-30, 4-4) they are just like the others but I will focus more on my concentration and on encouraging myself, on the strategy, on the ball and on my movements. After the match | Acknowledge your opponent, greet the umpire, family members and coach (talk with him); stretch your muscles and go to have a shower; enjoy your success and learn from failures. (It is the way to improve). If you lose the battle, don’t miss the lesson. |
| Notes | **Take notes down of key moments in the match, how you reacted, and how that reaction was positive or could be improved in future.** |
CONCLUSION

This article has tried to introduce two preparation and evaluation tools for competitive tennis matches in order to help players and coaches to get the best out of the coaching and competition cycle. These tools are a practical way to assist coach and player in the development of their tennis.

REFERENCES


