



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.

Key words: Match evaluation, Competition plan, Tennis.

Received: 20 November 2010.

Accepted: 26 December 2010.

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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.

Name: _____ Date: _____; Event: _____ Round: _____ Coach: _____			
Opponent: _____ History: W: 2 L: 1 Result: 6/4, 2/6, 6/2 Evaluation: 1set: 8 2set: 5 3set: 7 Total: 7			
Confidence: projects a powerful image; gets courage between points; believes he will win.	8	6	7 6
Motivation: plays 100% each ball; grows and enjoys tough times; performance and not result oriented	9	2	7 6
Concentration: Focused on the ball and his opponent, keeps concentration on "Here and now"; uses routines between points and at change overs.	10	4	6 7
Arousal: keeps calm, does not get upset; gets constantly active and relaxed according to the situation;	6	3	10 7
<i>Which are the specific objectives for this match? What do I need to improve?</i>			
Objective: 1: Leg bend _____; 2 2: Do not complain if I miss a point _____; 7	Note: 1. Toss ball higher on 1st service 2. Do not repeat strokes, change direction		
Tactical analysis:	Technical analysis:	Physical analysis:	
Plan A: How am I going to play? Fast, short points; to his backhand, rush to the net and volley.	FH: 8 Endurance 9 BH: 9 Strength 6 Volley: 10 Speed 8 Overhead Smash: 10 Relaxation 2 DS: 8 Flexibility 7 Lob: 2 Arousal 1 1st Serve: 3 Leg work 10 2nd Serve: 6 Point recovery 8		
Plan B: In case the previous one fails. Defend, lifting and hitting drop shots.			
How am I going to play the next match?: Agressively, slicing backhand and rushing to volley			

Figure 1. Example match evaluation form.

COMPETITION PLAN
<p>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, anti vibration dampeners, paper/pencil, sun glasses, towel, hat, contact lenses, clips, mp3, gloves, magazine).</p>
<p>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)</p>
<p>Warming up (If you want peace, get ready for war) Static: 20s x3 (Gastrocnemius, abductors, ischiotibials, gluteus, quadriceps, biceps, forearms) Dynamic: (Continuous run, warming up, rope jumping, line sprints) Mental: music, I breathe and I feel: the 4 Cs: Concentrated, Calm, Confident and Competitive.</p>
<p>Rest (The three "Rs") RECOVER: I dry my sweat, drink, eat and breathe slowly. RECONSIDER: If I win : I do the same; If I am losing the match: reassess tactical objectives, consider plan B REACT: I accelerate breathing, get courage, hit and use energy.</p>
<p>Routines between points (Think easy...play easy) 1. Positive physical response (if I am winning) and correction + 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).</p>
<p>Match situations, reading the match - If losing: Tennis 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. Be 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: (30-30; 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.</p>
<p>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 failure. (It is the way to improve!). If you lose the battle, dont miss the lesson.</p>
<p>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.</p>

Table 1. Competition plan.



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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.

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