New trends on tennis psychology and psychological training.

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ABSTRACT
This article reviews the main developments of sports psychology in general and tennis psychology in particular during the last 20 years. It focuses on four main areas: specific psychological analysis and testing, on-court mental training, psychological training aids, and technological equipment that can be used for mental training in tennis. It provides practical examples and tools for a true tennis-specific mental training that will benefit players at all levels of the game.

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INTRODUCTION
During the last 20 years, sport psychology in general, and tennis psychology in particular have developed around four main areas:

1/ Those general psychological questionnaires, that were so difficult to fill in, have been replaced by more specific and concrete tests, that are directly related to sport practice.

2/ Mental training, which used to be far from technical and tactical training, is increasingly becoming part of performance parameters. That is to say, on-court psychology is integrated to classical training drills. Mental preparation is planned for the court, and always holding a racquet.

3/ There exist now new pedagogical tools which facilitate on-court practice, and help coaches to provide players with something more concrete instead of something that had always been perceived as abstract.

4/ The exponential development of new technologies has taken psychological training from the Stone Age to Star Wars, due to software based video analysis tools and bio-feedback.

This article illustrates this development with some examples.

SPECIFIC PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND TESTING
Here is an extract of a self-evaluation test for emotional control:

1/ BEFORE AN IMPORTANT MATCH
On the night before the match you’re so nervous that you can’t get to sleep. The closer the match is getting, the more nervous and tense you feel.

You can’t wait to play your first match. You warm up with enthusiasm. You can feel power gradually rising up within yourself. You are like a boxer about to enter the ring.

For you it is a match like all others. You don’t even think about it. You go calmly through your pre-match ritual. You feel calm and relaxed.

You feel weak and have no energy. You’re counting on the first set to wake you up and get re-energized.

2/ AFTER A FAULT ON AN EASY BALL
You scream names to yourself. You make angry gestures. And you cannot keep your mind off that fault until the next point.

You make the same movement again correcting it dynamically. Then you encourage yourself and jump about a little to get ready for the next point.

Faults just go by and never affect you. You mentally erase your mistakes and you move on to the next point feeling calm and unconcerned.

Your body language is poor. You look fed up. You breathe out in a disillusioned way.

There are similar tests for other mental skills such motivation, concentration, self-confidence, etc.

Here is an example of a match observation sheet centered on the attitude of the player:

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You scream names to yourself. You make angry gestures. And you cannot keep your mind off that fault until the next point.

You make the same movement again correcting it dynamically. Then you encourage yourself and jump about a little to get ready for the next point.

Faults just go by and never affect you. You mentally erase your mistakes and you move on to the next point feeling calm and unconcerned.

Your body language is poor. You look fed up. You breathe out in a disillusioned way.
This match observation sheet, to be used by the coach, can easily be used by the player as a match self analysis tool, which can be easily filled in to help the player to become aware of his/her strengths and progress in the mental aspect during a match.

ON COURT TRAINING

Among all the range of on-court exercises, this one has the advantage of helping with all four: technical, tactical, physical and mental aspects

This drill is for three or four players. The coach feeds the balls from the basket. One player is on the base line, inside the court. He receives balls that are short and to the center, which he hits back with offensive forehands aiming at the area limited by the 12 targets (see diagram). If the ball is inside the area, the player wins one point (+1). If the ball is outside the area, the player loses one point (-1). The aim is to reach «+5». The series stops when the player reaches «+5» or «-5». He picks up his balls while another player takes over and so on...The exercise may also be done with backhands or any other shot in a chosen area. The size of the area is of course determined according the level. To emphasize success and reduce the feeling of failure, one may give two points when the area is reached, and take away only one when the ball is out. In this exercise, the target is an area situated 1 meter away from the lines. The player thus integrates the notion of security margin to his offensive shots.

To use scoring allows the player to measure his level of accuracy and efficiency under the pressure of the score. As to the technical aspect, this exercise strengthens the stroke by means of repetition. The target zone provides a tactical dimension. The number of repetitions, the physical demands of each stroke and the speed to recover the hitting position add a physical dimension to the exercise. The scoring system helps to develop mental skills like concentration, tolerance to failure and self confidence. This is a very complete exercise which very well illustrates the concept of integral training.

TEACHING EQUIPMENT

The following are simple examples of teaching equipment used to facilitate the implementation of concrete on court mental training exercises.

Visual concentration : use smaller micro balls ) or bigger (foam balls) training balls or even odd bouncing Z–shaped balls to foster visual concentration

Body language : ask players to play points after throwing the dice so as to determine the specific role to be played and to be used in order to become aware of the impact of the body language on the game. (The 6 sides of the dice are: Warrior, Zen Master, Eye of the Tiger, Loser, Nervous, Complainer ).

Routine of concentration : required teaching tools : 4 steps routine markers. Just after the last strike of a point, ask the player to start this four step after-point routine, in the following order :

Step 1 : Turn your back
Step 2 : Cut the contact between hand and grip
Step 3 : Breathe out
Step 4: Fix your strings

The coach has three or four players facing him. He feeds two balls: the first one is short and to the center (1), the player should hit an offensive shot, and the second is high and to the forehand side (2), the player should hit a high winning volley. After the last shot, all the player has to do is to go through the four steps that are marked on the ground. This visual reminder furthers learning and helps the routine become automatic.

**USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

These are some of the software tools available to support the psychological aspect of training:

This excellent bio-feedback software called emWave helps players to appreciate the impact of breathing, internal dialogue and mental images to control emotions.

To support technical or tactical visualization exercises, to increase awareness of body language, there is a very well developed video analysis software tool called Dartfish. There is also another tool developed by Dartfish, a platform called Dartfish TV, for distant use.

Windows movie maker is a video assembled software to be used for motivation clips and to be watched before the match.

Although new technological and pedagogical tools that can be used for mental training appear on a daily basis, it is the role of the coach that is always key for the player’s sport education. In fact, apart from the mental preparation techniques and mental training exercises, the spirit of fair play and sport values must be emphasized from an early stage in order to provide solid foundations to the younger players.

**REFERENCES**