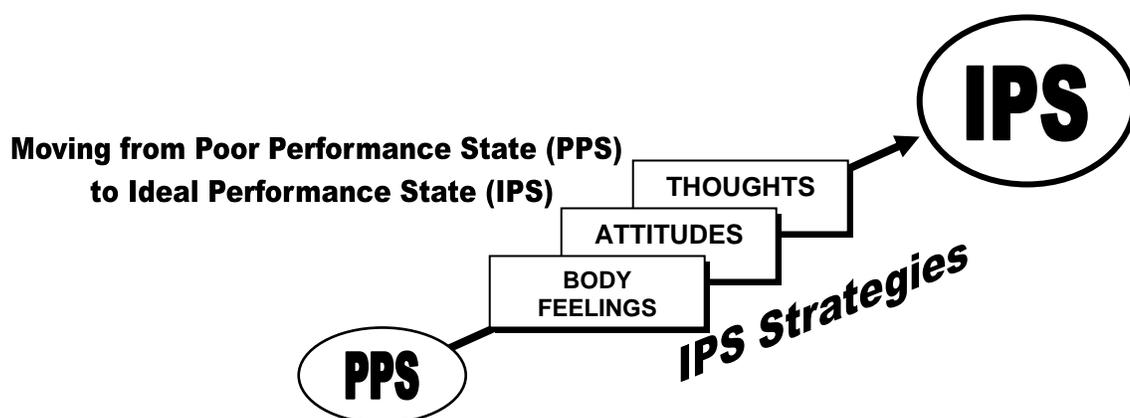


IPS

*IPS stands for **Ideal Performance State**. Every player has had times in a match where everything seemed to 'flow'. Playing seemed smooth and effortless. Thoughts were focused and minimal. On the other hand, every player has also felt the opposite when playing poorly (**Poor Performance State**). Unfortunately, when playing poorly, most players employ mental strategies that take them further from their IPS (e.g. Negative self-talk, emotional outbursts, etc.). The goal is to identify what you must do to maintain your IPS when in it, and employ strategies to get it back when you are off.*



Your IPS consists of three key components. Each one contains mental or emotional keys for playing at your best. Also, each one has psychological strategies to employ when you identify you are not in your IPS:

ATTITUDES

The key attitude associated to Ideal performance is confidence. No one plays well when they don't believe in themselves, or their shots. Ideal performance is associated with an attitude of confidence, and a positive view. Confidence must be generated from within (not by waiting to hit good shots). You will be confident when you act and talk to yourself as a confident person. It must become who you are. Confidence is not arrogance (the need to show and tell others how good you are). Confidence is a calm belief in yourself and your shots. It is the opposite of being fearful about the outcome.

IPS Attitude Key Words: "Positive", "Confident"

Note on "Positive" thoughts: Some players mistakenly believe that "Positive" thinking means smiling and calling bad things good. That belief only leads to frustration. Positive thoughts are simply a focus on the "here and now", not what just happened or, what may happen in the future. In tennis psychology, a thought is 'negative' because it doesn't lead to focus on the performance at hand.

Note on Emotions: Emotions are part of being human and can't be easily switched off. It is helpful to view emotions as neither "positive", or "negative", they are simply fuel. Gasoline is fuel. It can be used 'positively' and put in the tank to drive the engine or, it can be poured over the car and lit on fire. Emotions, like gasoline, can be utilized to drive your focus and fight or, used to blow yourself up. Don't try to switch emotions off, use them to ignite a greater focus or determination.

Strategy to get to IPS Attitudes: The best way to control attitudes is by how you talk to yourself. Called "self-talk", it is a powerful tool over your mood. Most normal people would react poorly to negative communication from others. That same communication from yourself, to yourself, will also sour your attitude and hurt performance. Say things to yourself that will boost performance like; "Let's go!" "Believe!" "Come on!" "Do it!", etc.

THOUGHTS

The rule of thumb in regards to thoughts during play is, less is more. Poor performance is associated with more thoughts (e.g. telling yourself technical details, thinking about the score, what will happen if you lose, etc.). Ideal performance is associated with one or two key mental focus points and very simple thought processes that are typically tactical (e.g. move my opponent around).

IPS Thought Key Words: “*Simple*”, “*Single focus*”

Strategy to get to IPS Thoughts: Focus on one simple thought for the match. For some players, it doesn't even have to be a thought. For example, humming a tune in your head can work well. Certain music can be associated to the rhythms of playing well. You will have to find what works best for you however, key focus points that have worked well for others include:

- **Footwork:** focus on keeping your feet moving and positioning well for every shot
- **Preparation:** focus on setting up early for every shot
- **Impact Point:** focus on impacting a ball in a good relationship to your body

BODY FEELINGS

Ideal performance is associated with feeling loose, coordinated, and explosive. Feelings of being tight, moving in a 'jerky' way, or the opposite (feelings of being 'lackadaisical' and 'moving in slow-motion'), are associated with poor performance. This is a difficult balancing act. On the one hand, being tense slows reaction and impairs coordination. But, being so relaxed you are lethargic hinders the explosive movements required for top play. Having the right intensity in tennis means being sharp and active, yet calm and loose. That is the balance you must achieve to attain your IPS.

IPS Body Feeling Key Words: “*Relaxed*”, “*Intense*”

Strategy to get to IPS Body Feelings: The best method professionals use to stay loose and relaxed is to exhale fully at impact. It is difficult to stay tight and exhale at the same time. Exhaling creates a physiological 'relaxation response'. When a player is tight, they tend to hold their breath. Synchronizing the exhale with your impact also helps timing and a solid impact.

To create intensity, the rule is, “motion causes emotion”. In other words, if you feel sluggish, bounce up and down and shuffle like a champion boxer before the point begins. Keeping your feet moving will prime your muscles to be ready to pounce.



Tennis requires focus

Court Home-work

Measuring IPS: With a partner, play tiebreakers to re-create some competitive pressure. If that doesn't create enough of a psychological challenge, play with one player starting with an advantage of 3 points or, play with one serve only. As you play, measure your IPS on a scale of 1 (poor IPS) to 10 (excellent IPS). If you are below 8, identify which IPS component (Thoughts, Attitude, Body Feelings) is off and employ the IPS strategies to get it back to a 9/10. Do this measurement process before starting every point as part of your in-between point routine.

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the work of Dr. James Loehr for this article
For additional resources for coaches and players, go to:

www.acecoach.com