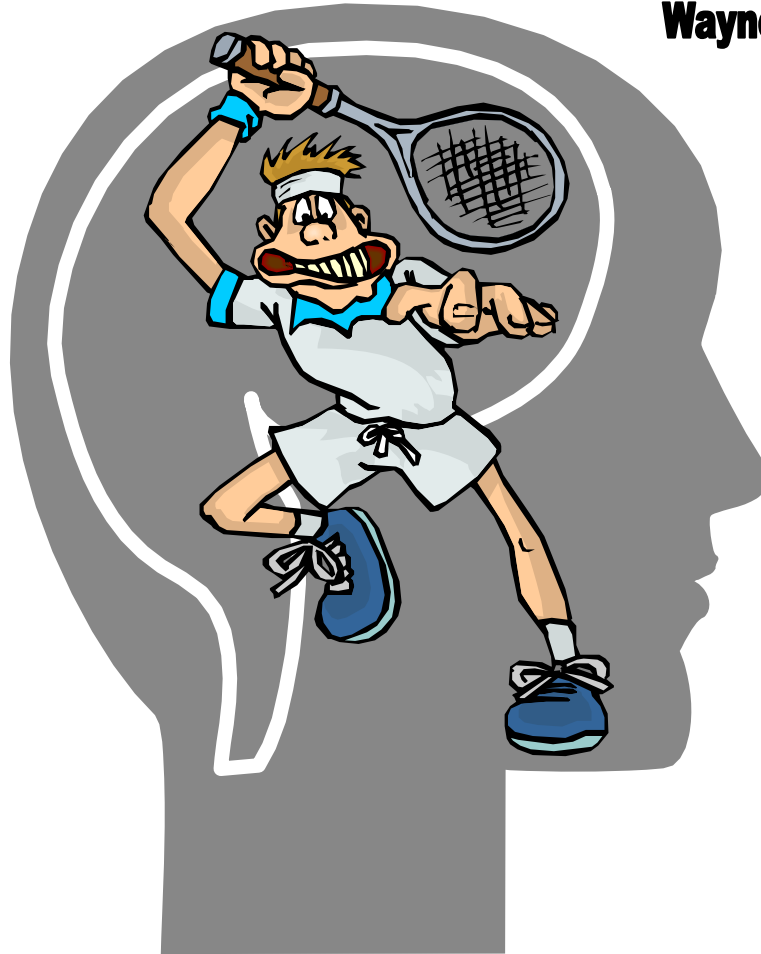


# MENTAL TOUGHNESS

Psychological Training notes for GCTC  
Performance Academy

**Wayne Elderton 2009**





# CONTROLLING YOUR MIND

## MANAGING YOUR PERFORMANCE STATE *BETWEEN* POINTS

At every level, the time spent actually running and hitting the ball is less than 20%. Some 2-3 hour Wimbledon matches have less than 10 minutes of this, 'work' time! There is more opportunity to be distracted during the 80% non hitting time in the match. Techniques to refocus and maintain focus in between points will allow a player to be "In the moment". Many disciplined 'pro' strikers are beginners when it comes to what they do with those 20 seconds following the end of the last point and beginning of the next.

**The goal is to perform a standard sequence of behaviors between each point to set a mental state that allows you to perform your best in the next point.**

**"ROUTWEENS":** Every professional has a disciplined in-between-point-routine they follow to prepare for a point. The following procedure will allow you to be a 'P.R.O' with your time.

Adapted from Dr. Jim Loehr, 'Mental Toughness Training.'

<p style="font-size: 48pt; color: red; text-align: center;">P</p>	<p><b>POSITIVE REACTION:</b>  <i>(Head up, racquet up, positive 'self talk', and confident movement into position)</i>          Training a positive reaction after each point will project an image to your opponent of being strong and unbeatable. By acting out the facial expressions, body language, and thoughts that accompany being positive, you will often perform up to that standard (even if you do not feel that way. <b>Great players act their way into proper feelings rather than waiting to feel the right way before they act properly.</b> Dwelling on a past mistake or projecting an image that tells your opponent they have the upper hand will give them confidence. Positive thinking is not, 'putting on a happy face' and ignoring poor play. Rather, it is choosing to focus on the, 'here and now' and giving 100% of your energy, emotion, and attention to the task at hand (e.g. serving or returning the next ball).</p>
<p style="font-size: 48pt; color: red; text-align: center;">R</p>	<p><b>ROUTINE/RELAX:</b>  <i>(Relax with familiar movements &amp; positive thoughts before each point)</i>          Every good player has a 'routine' of movements they go through before each serve or return. We all know Pete Sampras's, 'bounce-the-ball-and-lift-the-foot' routine he performs before each serve, or the bouncing or rocking many players perform before a return. These routines serve a purpose. They allow you to, 'get your mind together' before the point and relax because of their familiar and repetitive quality. It is important to get rid of muscle tension and mental stress so each point can start loose and fearless. These routines need to be developed and become a part of your serve and return.</p>
<p style="font-size: 48pt; color: red; text-align: center;">O</p>	<p><b>ORGANIZE:</b>  <i>(Plan your serve or return or the tactical pattern you want to perform)</i>          "If you aim for nothing, you will usually hit it." The more defined the goal of your shot will be, the better the chance of performing well. Take a few seconds to organize a, 'point plan'. This will give you (or your team in doubles) a goal to work towards and a clear sense of purpose for each shot (In doubles the 'Organize' stage would come before the 'Routine' stage.) The job is to pre set decisions as much as possible to not fall into the trap of being a victim and just reacting. Organizing each point in advance will help confidence by making you feel in charge of each point. Frustration will be minimized since you will get a clearer picture of what happens each point when you compare what occurred with the, 'blueprint' of your point plan.</p>



# CONTROLLING EFFECTS OF EMOTIONS

## MANAGING ANXIETY LEVELS

In addition to controlling attention, emotions are also involved in peak performance. Emotions will always be active in tennis. It is the *effects* of the emotion that must be channeled towards achieving goals. Emotions when harnessed are a powerful fuel.

### ANXIETY CONTROL

One of the key ways to control emotions is becoming aware of how excited, intense, and 'activated' you are. This is called your 'Anxiety level'. Tennis is a precision sport requiring specific and individual anxiety levels. In football, high activation will help hitting harder and running faster. Imagine getting that excited to sink a short putt in golf! Over-activated tennis players have too much muscle tension and loose coordination. Under-activated players will be too lackadaisical to perform at their peak.

**WHEN OVER-ACTIVATED:** There are two main techniques to bring our Anxiety level down and promote a, 'relaxed intensity'.

**1) Breathing:** It is nearly impossible to exhale fully and have muscle tension. Timing an exhalation with your impact will help focus and keep you relaxed and loose for the impact. Good racquet speed and coordination will be the result.

**2) Tense & Relax:** Pick specific muscle groups that feel tense (usually the shoulders & neck) during play. Tense those muscles and then loosen them. Try to feel the tension drain from the muscles.

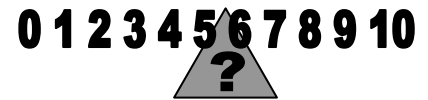
**WHEN UNDER-ACTIVATED:** There are two additional techniques we can use to pump ourselves up.

**1) Positive Self Talk:** Keep a focus and positive intensity by being your own 'motivational coach'. Say phrases like: "I can rise to this challenge! I love a good battle! let's go!. Come on!"

**2) Bounce:** Motion causes emotion. Bounce up and down and use your legs like springs to pump up (like a boxer).

### MENTAL TRAINING TIPS:

- **ANXIETY AWARENESS**  
Scale off your anxiety level from 1 (lackadaisical) to 10 (Over-activated). When playing your best, become aware of where you are on that scale. This will be your optimum level.

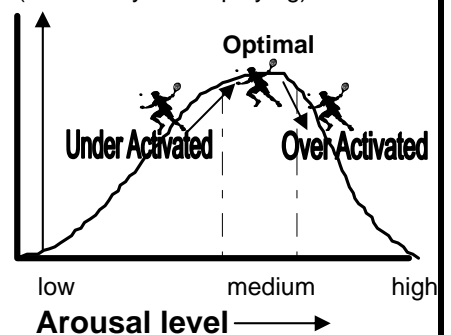


### MENTAL PRACTICE:

- **ANXIETY DRILL:** Play a tie breaker. Give a bonus point if you can maintain your optimum anxiety level by performing the techniques to pump up or relax. One bonus point for every point correct anxiety is maintained.

### Level of Performance

(How well you are playing)





# CONTROLLING EFFECTS OF EMOTIONS

## CONFIDENCE AND MOMENTUM

### THE BIG 'MO'

Confidence is important in tennis. The building of confidence is called momentum (the big 'Mo'). A player's job is to become aware and build your own momentum as well as break the momentum of your opponent.

A German Tennis Federation study found that the player who wins the most series of 3 point 'strings' will win a match over 98% of the time. One possible conclusion is that three points is the largest goal we should shoot for when playing. Playing one shot at a time is the goal for proper focus however, to build momentum and confidence a series of points is required.

There are 3 'States of Momentum' a player can be in:

- **A player has momentum** (they have won 3 consecutive points or more)
- **A player must break the opponent's momentum** (they have lost 3 consecutive points or more)
- **A player is in transition** (neither player has accumulated 3 consecutive points yet)

In most matches, players are in various states of transition. By working towards accumulating a 3 point 'string' a player will more easily play one point at a time and maintain a 'Here & Now' focus.

**MISTAKE MANAGEMENT:** One way confidence is destroyed is by dwelling on mistakes. Most players don't even flinch when they make the one mistake at the beginning of a match. So why is it that one set and four games later that same mistake will disrupt a players whole game?

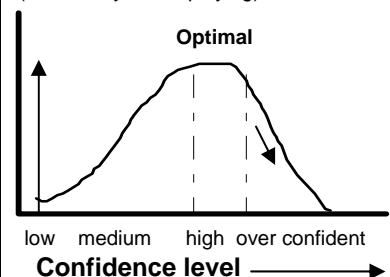
Every player has a backpack on when they play. Every mistake is like putting a ball into the backpack. Soon the pack is filled with balls and the player is slower and weighted down. The secret is that every player can, 'undo the straps', and let the backpack go. Mistakes are 'history' and their emotional impact must not be allowed to infect the Here & Now.

**It is only after we deal and channel our emotions that proper refocusing can occur.**

### MENTAL PRACTICE:

- **'MO' DRILL:** Play points with a partner. Try to string together a series of three points by playing "Oreo". The goal is to build an Oreo (made of 3 layers). Look to win one point and give yourself a chocolate wafer. Winning another point gets you a creamy centre, and the last point the final wafer. After building your Oreo, look to start the process again. Build emotion and get excited about accumulating each layer. Losing a point before completing the cookie erases all your layers. Look to break the opponent's momentum by focusing on getting your first layer and starting a new cookie.
- **MISTAKE MANAGEMENT DRILL:** Play points with a partner. On every mistake take a ball and toss it to the back of the court. Use this as a symbol of not putting the mistake, 'on your back'.

**Level of Performance**  
(How well you are playing)



# MENTAL TOUGHNESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Adapted from Dr. Jim Lohr, Tennis Magazine Article, July 1992)

## CIRCLE THE ANSWER THAT DESCRIBES YOU BEST IN COMPETITION

- 1) *During a match, I laugh, smile, or crack a joke after I make a dumb mistake or when I feel nervous.*
- 1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time
- 2) *I control myself and don't get upset at things beyond my control, like wind, an obnoxious opponent, poor court conditions, etc.*
- 1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time
- 3) *I can play an entire match without banging my racquet on the ground, whining out loud, or throwing a mini tantrum.*
- 1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time
- 4) *I look and feel positive, encourage myself, smile, and acknowledge opponent's good shots, even if there is a lot of pressure in the match.*
- 1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time
- 5) *I pump my fist and am not shy about showing much positive emotion.*
- 1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time
- 6) *I protest if I feel my opponent is giving me bad calls.*
- 1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time
- 7) *I look my opponent in the eye, even when they are all the way across the net.*
- 1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time
- 8) *I call lines boldly and with certainty.*
- 1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time
- 9) *My errors come in bunches.*
- 1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time
- 10) *When someone gives me a bad call, I stay upset for at least the next game.*
- 1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time

11) *Once I start feeling negative, it's downhill from there.*

**1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time

12) *I struggle with my temper.*

**1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time

13) *When I am playing poorly, or the pressure heats up in a match, I feel like I am in a daze.*

**1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time

14) *When things go badly in competition, I just stop caring and go dead emotionally.*

**1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time

15) *During a tense part of a match I act too casual, move slowly between points, and look around the court.*

**1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time

16) *I forget the score or forget to change ends.*

**1** **2** **3** **4** **5**  
Almost never Once in a while Half the time Most of the time Almost every time

**SCORING: Total up the score in each category (circle your scores)**

**Questions 1-4 EMOTIONAL FLEXIBILITY**

*Ability to adapt to poor situations*

16 - 20 Excellent flexibility  
11 - 15 Good flexibility  
6 - 10 Signs of inflexibility  
0 - 5 Considerable inflexibility

**Questions 5-8 EMOTIONAL STRENGTH**

*Positive energy, not intimidated*

16 - 20 Excellent Strength  
11 - 15 Good Strength  
6 - 10 Signs of Strength  
0 - 5 Considerable lack of strength

**Questions 9-12 EMOTIONAL RESILIENCY**

*Ability to "bounce back" after a difficult challenge*

0 - 5 Great resiliency  
6 - 10 Good resiliency  
11 - 15 Lack of resiliency  
16 - 20 Very poor resiliency

**Questions 13-16 EMOTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS**

*Ability to quickly react to a challenge*

0 - 5 Great responsiveness  
6 - 10 Good responsiveness  
11 - 15 Lack of responsiveness  
16 - 20 Very poor responsiveness