

MENTAL TRAINING FOR BEGINNER (TENNIS DRILLS)

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Abstract

Positive psychological growth requires the coach to plan, develop, and implement a number of specific coaching strategies. At the beginner level, emphasis should be placed on initiating the development of children's tennis self-confidence, leadership skill and competitive spirit, while increasing their commitment to tennis. Tennis drills here will improve your mental abilities – concentration, perseverance, emotion control and so on. They have other benefits too which you'll discover when you start practicing them, but their main point is learning to play at your best despite pressure. A tennis player is most efficient and capable of good results when he is in the zone state.

INTRODUCTION

The mental side of tennis is extremely important. Jimmy Connor said that at the professional level, tennis is 95% mental. When opposing players are closely matched in ability (technique, speed, strength, etc), match results are frequently determined by mental factors such as concentration, confidence and competitive spirit. Athletes such as Jimmy Connors, who consistently perform at or near their best, especially under pressure at important competitions, possess the quality known as mental toughness. Mental skills are learned in the same way as physical and technical skills (time, effort, practice). It is therefore critical that the process of developing mentally tough players begins at the same time at which children are introduced to a formalized tennis program.

Researchers in the area of children's sport have identified the behaviour of significant adults (i.e. coach, parent) as one of the primary factors influencing the degree to which children will acquire positive psychological characteristics during their early years. More participation in a sport program does not ensure the development of desirable qualities. Participation can have both positive and negative effects on the psychological development of the young athlete, depending on the quality of the program. Positive psychological growth requires the coach to plan, develop, and implement a number of specific coaching

strategies. At the beginner level, emphasis should be placed on initiating the development of children's tennis self-confidence, leadership skill and competitive spirit, while increasing their commitment to tennis.

Commitment, commitment can be defined as the level of motivation and effort directed towards tennis activities. In the later, this may involve training and competing more than 20 hours per week, or even complete dedication to a career in tennis. Commitment objectives during the early years are directed at getting kids involved in, and hopefully hooked on, tennis and sport.

Competitive Spirit, This quality is defined as the desire to compete and demonstrate one's skills in competitive situations. Although result in official competition should not be highly emphasized at the under 11 level, children future approach to competition is often determined at this stage of their development.

Self-Confidence, The way in which children and evaluate themselves is one of the most important factors that determine their choice of activity, and their level of motivation to participate in that activity. A child's level of self-confidence in sport will determine the amount of effort and persistence exerted in adverse condition. High levels of tennis confidence will contribute to a child's overall self-esteem (sense of personal worth – pride / shame). It is important to emphasize the development of the tennis player as both an athlete (self-confidence) and a person (self-esteem). Low self-confidence behaviours include: avoiding activities, giving up easily when learning new skills, exerting minimal effort during practice game, setting unrealistically high goal, attributing success to luck and failure to lack of ability, adopting strategies to avoid failure (making excuse, feeling sick etc.) Those with high levels of tennis confidence tend to try harder and will persist under challenging conditions until they reach their goal.

Leadership, It is important for development of the player that they are regularly given responsibilities by the coach (eg. to lead the group in the warm up; to demonstrate something to the group etc.). By giving them "leadership task" to perform, the player will begin to feel independent and responsible which in turn will lead to improvement in their self confidence.

Tennis Drills

Tennis drills here will improve your mental abilities – concentration, perseverance, emotion control and so on. They have other benefits too which you'll discover when you start practicing them, but their main point is learning to play at your best despite pressure. A tennis player is most efficient and capable of good results when he is in the zone state. That's when his mind is empty. If a player is thinking about anything during ball exchange, he disturbs his concentration and consequently makes errors. Especially damaging are thoughts about negative outcome just before the point. The most common is thinking about double faulting just before the serve. You can almost predict that a double fault will follow.

One of the main purposes of these drills is to show the player how to find this zone state and how much better he performs in that state. And that is actually the only thing besides effort that a player can control. Many of these tennis drills will put the player under pressure and then he will have to perform a task under these circumstances. Sometimes a player competes against himself and sometimes against a partner. In any case, if a player wants to be successful in a real match, then he needs to practice his skills with various tennis drills and develop mental toughness through time. A player cannot become mentally tough by reading books or by just going to a sports psychologist. He needs to experience success in real situation to really become good with his mental abilities. The first step can be information in various forms – books, websites, workshops and so on. The next steps are tennis drills that are designed to improve mental toughness.

Then a player needs to play practice matches where he is playing a match but at the same time also practicing his mental skills. The final stage are real tennis matches where at first a player is not that good with his mental skills, but through repetition and success they become automatic. Some of the drills are of the more general nature – like serving drills, which apply to all serving situations. Then other drills are more situation specific oriented – like playing for points, but practicing perseverance and playing under pressure. Some drills are very match

score specific - like playing games where the server starts at 30:40.

Basic Tactical Tennis Drills

(Improving Accuracy And Decision Making Skills)

The following tactical tennis drills are best practiced with beginners and intermediate players who already have solid ball control and need to work on directions, better ball control with spin and decision making skills. Basic tennis tactics focus on moving the opponent, and in order to do that the players must be accurate with their shots and know which options are possible (to which directions they can play the ball). Here's how you can progress from simple drills to more complex ones that will help players improve their consistency with groundstrokes played in different directions and, at the same time, teach them how to make tactical decisions that they will face in competitive situations.

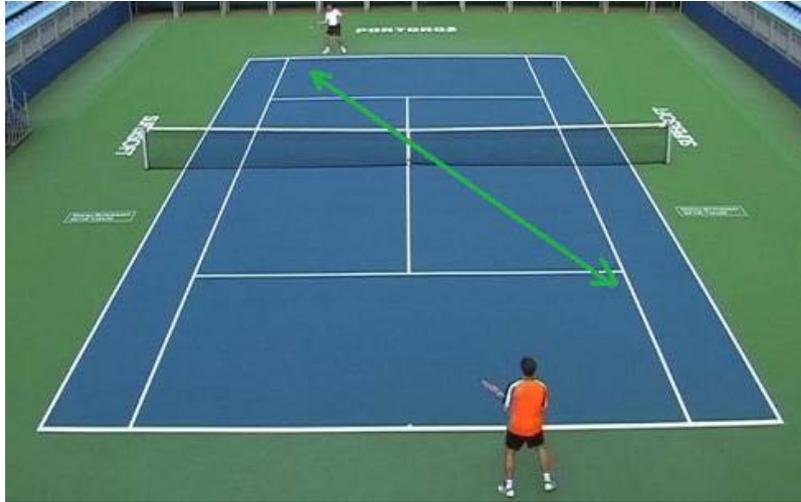
1. The Long Crosscourt



Both players rally long crosscourt

Both players rally from the deuce side and try to keep the ball over the service line (deep). Rally for three to five minutes, then change to the advantage side, which is the backhand side for right-handers.

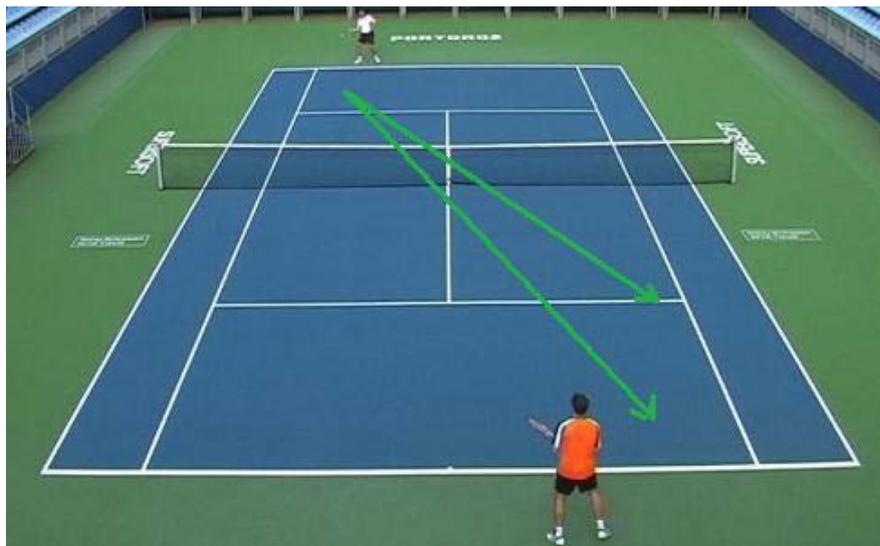
2. The Long-short Crosscourt



Orange player plays the ball deep, white player plays the ball short crosscourt

Players again rally crosscourt (starting on deuce side), where player A (orange) plays the ball deep and player B (white) plays the ball short crosscourt, so that the ball lands near the outside corner of the service box. Rally for three minutes and change tasks and then also change sides, rallying from the advantage side for a total of four times three minutes.

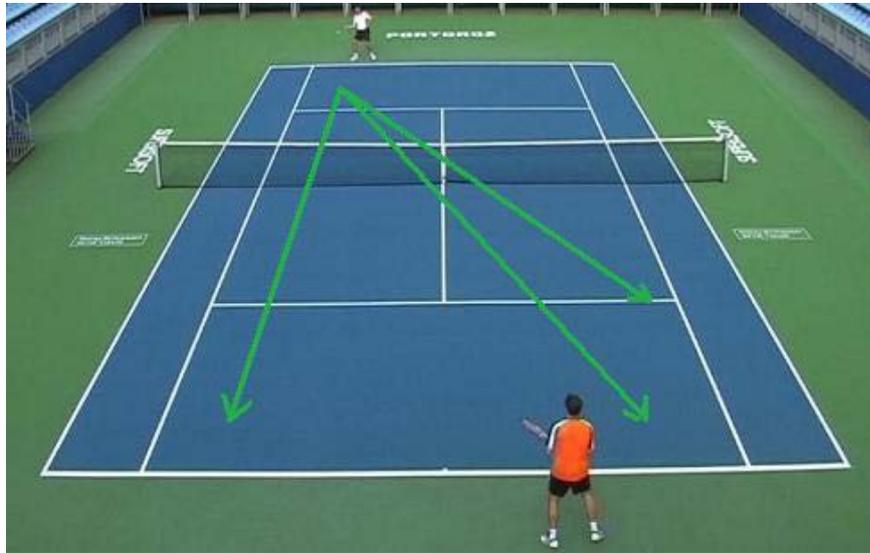
3. The Alternating Long-short Crosscourt



Orange player plays the ball deep, white player alternates between playing long and short crosscourt

Players rally crosscourt, where player A (orange) plays the ball deep and player B (white) alternates between playing the ball deep and playing the ball short. Players should rally for three minutes and change tasks. Make sure to change sides as well. The optional, and more advanced, version of this drill is to let player B make the choice about when to go short or long depending on the ball received. If the ball from player A is very deep, then player B should play it shorter.(Player B should attempt a short crosscourt.)

4. The Long-short Crosscourt With a Down the Line



Orange player plays the ball deep, white player plays long cross court, short crosscourt and then down the line

The first version of this drill is a closed drill, which means that the players stick to the pattern. Player A (orange) plays the ball deep crosscourt three times in a row (and starts the rally). Player B (white) plays first long crosscourt, then short crosscourt, and then down the line. For less skilled players, player A does not need to run for the ball, but can just let it go so that player B can focus on seeing where the ball landed and can make adjustments for the next rally. For more advanced players, player A can move to the other side and play the ball crosscourt to the other side where both players repeat the same pattern on the backhand side (for right-handers). The goal for more skilled players is to keep the rally going

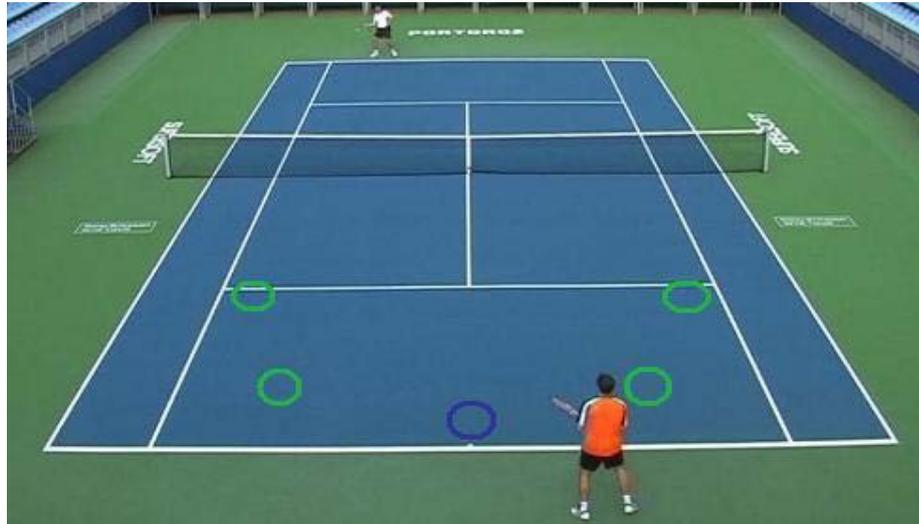
while sticking to this pattern of play. Change tasks and sides so that both players practice all situations.

5. Semi-open Situation

In the semi-open situation, allow player A (white) to play only long crosscourt on every ball that player B (orange) plays. Player B on the other hand chooses by himself whether he'll play long crosscourt, short crosscourt, or down the line. Player B must experiment with different decisions and see whether he is successful in the long term or not. Inexperienced players, for example, don't know yet that playing down the line when they are far behind the baseline is not a smart decision. Therefore, coaches **MUST** allow them to play that shot to **EXPERIENCE** what happens and learn by themselves. Player B must now focus on memorizing which patterns work and which patterns do not, so that the decisions later will become more automatic. The semi-open rules of this drill allow player B to know where player A will always play, so that the player B can move slightly early without spending that much mental energy and concentration on reading and reacting to player A's shots, but can focus on choosing which direction he'll play (long crosscourt, short crosscourt, or down the line).

6. Open Situation Training

In the open situation, both players can play any shot at any time. Perhaps the only limitation that players can have is that they don't play drop shots, come to the net, or play any other special shots so that they can focus on learning which decisions from the baseline- long crosscourt, short crosscourt, or down the line- work best. There's one more target to add, and you can decide based on your own judgment when you want to add it; that is a target in the middle, deep over the service line.



The white player has 5 targets to choose from for each of his shots. Tactical training enables the player to learn which shot is best used in each specific situation.

Playing in the middle can be very effective when attempting to neutralize the opponent from a defensive position, since the shot played in the middle doesn't open up angles from which the opponent can attack.

At the end, you can place four main targets (cones, or tapes) and one additional target on the court (see picture above) and have the player **DECIDE** with every shot which target he will aim for. When the player knows which target he is aiming for, his accuracy improves a lot and he keeps his focus throughout the rally. Players should avoid hitting the ball over the net without an intention and should always look to **either go offense** (by moving the opponent) **or to neutralize** the opponent. To neutralize means that the player attempts to **prevent attacks** by playing deep, usually crosscourt or down the middle. There are other ways of neutralizing, like playing high loopy shots or low slices but this can be the next step in progression in these tactical tennis drills. On every ball that comes over the net, the player needs to first decide whether he/she can attack or whether he/she needs to neutralize. After this main decision, the player then needs to decide the direction and type of shot to use. This progression of drills here will guide him/her to a quick understanding of the possible tactics and at the same time improve their accuracy and control of the shots. Through time and repetition, players will learn what works best.

Conclusion

Player and coaches believes that the mental side of tennis is extremely important, especially when physical abilities are equal. Tennis drills will improve your mental abilities – concentration, perseverance, emotion control and so on. They have other benefits too which you'll discover when you start practicing them, but their main point is learning to play at your best despite pressure. One of the main purposes of these drills is to show the player how to find this zone state and how much better he performs in that state. And that is actually the only thing besides effort that a player can control. Many of these tennis drills will put the player under pressure and then he will have to perform a task under these circumstances.

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