

overcoming

ANXIETY AND NERVES by Noel Callaghan

TEACH YOURSELF HOW TO PSYCHE YOURSELF UP, CALM YOURSELF DOWN AND OVERCOME ANXIETY. Do you perform well during training or practice but choke in competition? If feelings of nervousness, anxiety or fear interfere with your matchplay performance, learning to use a few tips from sports psychology may help you get your anxiety under control and reduce game day nerves.

Performance anxiety in TENNIS, sometimes referred to as ‘choking’ is described as a decrease in athletic performance due to much perceived stress. This Perceived stress often increases in athletes on game day and is often based upon the way the athletes interpret the situation. There could be various reasons such as (1) they have extremely high expectations of their success (2) give too much credit to their opposition (3) negative thinking and talk on court. It is rarely an external situation that causes stress, but rather the way the player’s self talk describes the situation that creates feelings of stress, anxiety and fear. For tennis players who choke during competition it is important to understand that the thoughts you have regarding the match CAN be modified, adjusted or controlled with appropriate routines and mental practice.

The player should first determine if thoughts of doubt, failure or a lack of confidence are due to a perceived lack of ability. If so, the self talk will generally lead to continued feelings of anxiety, nervousness, and tension. Athletes need to realise with this mindset it is impossible to do your best when your own internal voice is telling you otherwise.

To overcome performance anxiety and re-direct the negative self-talk it’s important to follow a few tips and set yourself some simple on-court routines.

IN ORDER TO PREPARE MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY, make sure you arrive at the event with plenty of time so you aren’t rushed, rushing to matches will only increase your stress. Do some easy stretching, a light run or skipping and make sure you get a thorough warm-up on court by making sure you move your feet and watch the ball.

RECOGNISE THAT PRE-MATCH JITTERS ARE NORMAL. Accept, rather than fight, the nervous energy you feel. Don’t misinterpret it by thinking that it is fear. That adrenaline rush you feel is normal and it is part of your body’s natural preparation for the match. **DO NOT** focus on it, it will go.



STAY PRESENT AND PLAY EACH POINT AT A TIME and avoid thinking too far into the match or thinking about the end result. If you find yourself thinking negative thoughts or negative self-talk, **STOP** and focus only on your breathing. Focusing on your breathing rhythm will automatically pull you back into the present.

FORCE A SMILE. If you are struggling with negative thoughts and can’t break out of it, simply force yourself to smile, even if only for a few seconds. This simple action will change your attitude in a split second. Perhaps that is all the time you need to relax back into your performance.

DEVELOP AN ON-COURT ROUTINE if you are feeling stressed, take your 20 seconds after each point to calm yourself down and re-group (breathe). Write yourself some reminder notes and read them at the change of ends eg., move your feet, watch the ball, hit with quality, make at least 5 rally balls etc etc. A big heart, a good head, fast feet and 100% effort is all you can ask of yourself because there will always be another match...