

The Mental Game: Work Smarter, Not Harder! It's a Game Changer

Welcome to The Mental Game, a feature with Rob Polishook, MA, CPC. Rob, a mental training coach who founded and directs Inside the Zone Sports Performance Group, helps athletes compete with confidence, calm, and concentration, often the difference between winning and losing.

Rob is no stranger to tennis. He works directly with tennis players, coaches, parents and teams at all levels. He is a regular speaker for the USPTA and has spoken internationally in Israel and India.

In this installment, Rob Polishook discusses 5 things which your child can do that will help you improve their game without picking up a racket.

As a parent, have you ever watched this scene? Your child just played in the quarterfinals of a tournament and lost in three hard fought sets. However in the second set, they held 3 match points but didn't convert! Ugg, I bet you know the feeling...in fact you can probably feel it now?

So after a few days, they head back on the court. Time does amazing things in terms of healing the pain. Now they continue to train; do the SAME things and again expect DIFFERENT results. Working on the forehand tweaking it so it's just right this time. Wasn't it Einstein who suggested this is the definition of insanity?

Mentally, the post match refrain is similar...You think "they need to work harder." If they had done *this or that*, the match would not have turned! Sure this rational is familiar...Isn't it always the case if we come up short, we didn't work hard enough? Well, maybe they did work hard enough? Just maybe... working harder isn't the answer?

I'd like to suggest 5 things which your child can do that will help you improve their game without picking up a racket! These things will not take much physical effort, however they require reading a few workouts from my book Tennis Inside the Zone- mental training workouts for champions. The workouts in the book focus on the mental game and will help them relax, slow down, and play calmer under pressure.

However, they will take some time. What I'm suggesting here is to take a step back, stop pushing or pulling. Now is the time to "let go" and untangle the knots which may be holding them back. This requires dedicated time to the mental game.

1st Workout: What Does it Take to Win? Awareness and the 5 A's. If I didn't know (dream on!) better Federer has been reading this workout. He has reframed his game to be more aggressive and come to net more both from the baseline and serve and volleying. What could your child change about their game if they looked at it more objectively? What's the number one thing that could help?

2nd Workout: How to Play in the Moment? It's as Easy as Breathing! How many times have you watched them get overwhelmed when an opponent made a questionable call? Or they played someone they expected to beat? The list goes on and on. Playing in the moment and staying present is key. This only happens if you can stay calm rather than spiraling out of control. Mike Bryan once told me when he gets nervous "he always focuses on his breath."

3rd Workout: You Cannot be Serious! Seven Steps to regaining your focus. It happens all the time. Can you remember a time their focus was spot on and then something happened which they don't expect and there goes the focus!. *The key* with concentration is not maintaining it 100%, but knowing when you lost it and how to get it back quickly.

4th Workout: I'm Better! How could I lose? Who hasn't said this? But they still lost? Why...? Usually the focus was in the wrong place. Another funny thing about concentration and tennis...It's not enough to concentrate! You MUST concentrate on the right thing! Hint: What you can control.

5th Workout: Sweet Victory: 7 Questions to ask after a Win (or loss). Many people think once the match is over you forget about it and go to the next one. I believe that's the time whether you win or lost

that all the learning can take place. In fact that's when the match starts... with your post match analysis. This workout is a great tool to help you analyze the match in an objective manner, learn from it, and incorporate your areas of improvement going forward.

Certainly over the previous year, your child has put a lot sweat and tears into their game. They should be congratulated for this. Now, as 2014 comes to a close and 2015 begins, let's purposely incorporate the mental component. Tennis Inside the Zone- mental training workouts for champions is a great way to bring the mental game into the picture. All of the work can be done off the court with the key focus being on not necessarily working harder, rather working smarter! If you're looking for a great example on the professional tour...just look no further than Roger Federer.

For more information about how to help you or your child achieve peak performance visit www.insidethezone.com.

Don't forget to mention that you read about Rob Polishook on USTA Eastern's website!