

A Survey of Mental Skills Training Knowledge, Opinions, and Practices of Junior Tennis Coaches

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INTRODUCTION

- USTA Player Development has made significant efforts to better educate coaches about sport psychology for the purposes of enhancing player development and performance.
- Are coaches employing, with junior players, the sport psychology curriculum being taught during coaching education?
- An exploratory focus group study was conducted to better understand if coaches are using mental skills training information being passed onto them, and how. Furthermore, it was important to identify ways to more efficiently and effectively convey this information to them.
- Focus groups were conducted with 20 elite junior tennis coaches (5 coaches per group) participating in a USTA coaches education program (Gould, Damarjian, & Medbery).
- Coaches felt that mental skills training included emotional control, focus and readiness, passion, and the ability to develop a winning strategy.
- A need for mental skills training for coaches was identified, and that coaches need to become more comfortable with mental skills training information.
- Training should focus on content and process of how to teach mental skills.
- Mental skills training information needs to be more user-friendly.

PURPOSE

- Because the previous study interviewed 20 coaches, a large scale survey of junior coaches mental skills knowledge, opinions, and practices was needed.
- Specifically, how important is mental skills training?
- What mental skills do junior tennis coaches teach?
- How do coaches teach these mental skills?
- What are recommendations for making mental skills training more effective?

METHOD

- Participants at the 1997 USTA area training center workshop were surveyed.
- 153 of the 325 coaches in attendance completed the survey (47%)

PARTICIPANTS

- 82% of coaches were male
- 90% of the coaches were Caucasian, 5% African-American, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Asian-American.
- Coaches averaged 38 years of age with 1.5 to 45 years of experience.
- Coaches on average worked with 10.9 sectionally ranked players and 2.5 nationally ranked players.

YEAR PERFORMED 1997

WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?

Importance of Mental Skills Needed in Junior Tennis

Mental Skill	Mean Importance	Standard Deviation
Enjoyment/Fun	9.70	1.01
Focus/Concentration	9.63	0.82
Self-confidence	9.45	1.25
Emotional control	9.31	1.16
Honesty-Integrity	9.11	1.65
Motivation/Passion	9.10	1.50
Practice Intensity	9.09	1.35
Positive Thinking/Self-Talk	9.05	1.29
Positively Managing Mistakes	8.96	1.44

➤Note: A rating of 1 signifies not important and 10 very important. A total of 24 mental skills were rated with only Team Unity, Post Match Speech, and Media Skills rated below a Mean = 7.

Three Most Important Mental Skills Needed by Age Group

12 and Under		14 and Under		16 and Under	
Enjoyment/Fun	27.3%	Enjoyment/Fun	14.3%	Focus/Concentration	12.1%
Focus/Concentration	10.0%	Focus/Concentration	10.0%	Enjoyment/Fun	10.8%
Emotional Control	8.2%	Goal Setting	9.7%	Motivation/Passion	8.4%

Coaches Level of Comfort Teaching Mental Skills

Mental Skill	Difficulty	Importance	Standard Deviation
Reframe Pressure	4.59	2.41	
Crisis-Adversity Management	4.57	2.41	
Media Skills	4.55	2.83	
Self-confidence	4.50	2.92	
Emotional Control	4.35	2.52	
Time Management	4.24	2.38	
Motivation/Passion	4.20	2.89	
Positively Managing Mistakes	4.09	2.55	
Imagery/Visualization	4.05	2.55	

➤Note: A rating of 1 signifies not difficult and 10 very difficult. A total of 24 mental skills were rated.

Roadblocks to Teaching Mental Skills

Mental Skill	Mean Frequency a Problem	Standard Deviation
Lack of Time	6.04	2.83
Lack of Interest on Part of Players	5.47	2.20
Difficult to Evaluate Mental Skills Training Success	5.07	2.26
Lack of Models/Examples of Other Coaches Teaching Mental Skills to Junior Players	4.83	2.68
Little Parental Support for Mental Skills Training	4.76	2.44
Lack of Practical Resources	4.62	2.29

➤Note: A rating of 1 signifies never a problem and 10 always a problem.

COACHING IMPLICATIONS

Coaches Opinions about Mental Skills Training: Five Opinions Most Agreed Upon

1. Players of all levels and abilities need mental skills training; but how this material is packaged may change with experience and player ability levels
2. Male and female players are different emotionally and because of this may react in a different way to the same situation.
3. Coaches must practice mental skill themselves if they are to have confidence teaching them to junior players.
4. Mental skills should be emphasized to a greater degree as players become more intense/competitive.
5. Coaches must be better taught how to detect and analyze player mental skill needs and abilities.

Types of Materials/Resources that are Most Helpful in Teaching Mental Skills to Junior Players: Five Most Useful

1. Mental skills, drills, and exercise forms
2. Mental skills training video
3. Junior tennis mental skills training book
4. Video showing coaches giving mental skills talks and leading exercises
5. Book explaining mental skills, drills, and exercises

➤From these results the USTA Player Development Division and the researchers at UNC Greensboro created a mental skills and drills handbook that has been distributed at high performance coaching workshops.
➤In addition, coaching and player workshops were conducted on how to teach/learn mental skills.



REFERENCES / RESOURCES

- Gould, D., Damarjian, N., & Medbery, R. (1999). An examination of mental skills training in junior tennis coaches. *The Sport Psychologist, 13*, 127-143.
- Gould, D., Medbery, R., Damarjian, N., & Lauer, L. (1999). A survey of mental skills training knowledge, opinions, and practices of junior tennis coaches. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 11* (1), 28-50.