The Beauty of the Backdraw

00:05  J: Welcome to the compete like a champion podcast where we explore the psychology of performance, advanced coaching and sports science through the lens of professional tennis. You're here with Dr. Larry Lauer, mental skill specialist, and coach Johnny Parkes with the USTA player development. Today's special guest is coach Mick, who is the director of experiential learning at the USTA national campus. Mick, welcome.

00:32  M: Hey, thanks a lot John. I appreciate it.

00:33  J: And our and our producer by the way. Producer extraordinaire. We gotta put that out there for this podcast.

00:39  I'm learning a ton.

00:41  L: With all these fancy mics and equipment. It's all due to coach Mick, making this all happen, so we really appreciate it.

00:46  L: It makes us feel like Dan Patrick, so thank you coach.

00:49  M: Hey, no problem.

00:50  J: When can you get us on ESPN for the live radio show?

00:53  M: I have a meeting next Thursday at noon if you can be there.

00:56  J: Too good. Well listen, so today's episode we're going to title the beauty of the backdraw, or the backdraw blues. So we're going to get into that. But coach Mick, you had a pretty good story for us about the, uh, the kind of the history of building up to playing backdraw and that and rankings and all this stuff. So you know, I'm going to give you the floor. So, let's hear it.

01:16  M: Yeah, we'll all kind of started before we started hitting the record button. We talked about these threads that are out about all these players that are backing out or dropping out of the backdraw at the nationals. And what I was saying just as running hundreds of tournaments, you know, in my career is before they came out with a ranking system that was all based on player record and your ranking. And if you had a ranking of, let's say, say Johnny was ranked 20, and Larry was ranked 30 in the Midwest, but Larry had a direct win over Johnny that took precedence over the ranking.

01:47  L: And that's likely, by the way.

01:49  M: Yes, exactly. So as a tournament director, you had to look at all that stuff. Everybody turned in their ranking sheets or their player record sheets and you had to make your seeds based on their player records. And sometimes it was
easy and sometimes it was hard. But the problem, and this is why they came up with the ranking points or one of the reasons anyway was that I'd have one of my better players, not even support my own tournament. And I said, well Kyle, why aren't you playing? He says, well, because I have to win if I don't win, the only thing that can come out of this, if I don't win is my rankings going to go down and if I win, it's probably gonna stay the same. So there was nothing in it for him. Now with the ranking points, it was different because now he didn't really care if there were players at a lower level than him and the draw because it was just easier for him to collect those points. And so that's one of the reasons why the point system came into play for junior players, just to keep them from ducking tournaments and getting some of the better players to play against each other. Yeah, no, that's very interesting. I mean it's, it's very, to me, fascinating how our structure really impacts the decision making process of our players, our parents and our coaches. I just come back recently from the 2018 national clay court tournament and we've got 53 matches that weren't able to come to completion in the backdraw and 44 on the girls side. That's a lot of matches. Tally that up. That's 53 times 206 players affected by that 53 that probably decided to either withdraw. I mean I was seeing some withdrawals at like 6-0 5-0, 6-2 5-0 down withdrawal and I'm going why? I mean why withdraw at that 5-0 point and I, I watched a couple of these matches and they were tired and they'd been there for six days. Played quite a few matches, but why not just see that match out.

03:35
L: Well, it sounds like there's two separate decisions that are being made. One is to not play at all. Yeah. Which we should discuss but secondly is to play, but then to retire before the match ends. So I think that those are two things that we should discuss.

03:52
J: Yeah, I mean if I'll go first here. You know, just I was around the 12's, the 14's and then the 16's and 18's draws. So I was able to spend time at each site. So this might not be an exact representation because I wasn't at one site for the whole week, but it really appeared that there's a lot less withdrawals in the backdraws in the 12's, first of all, because they have these compass draws, so they come here and play lots of matches and the parents and the coaches and the players, they really value playing that many matches. Right. If they're going to know the finances and the expense of coming to play these national tournaments is pretty high and we have to respect that. You know, it's a tough old deal playing at this level, a young age and spending this amount of money to play. So the opportunity cost I think is seen as lots of opportunity because they're already invested into spending the money to get here and if they only got here and played two matches and that's a go, that's a lot of money. But they've come here and the kids are able to play lots of matches, get a lot of experience and go put themselves through that. There's a lot of opportunity. Then it seems like as you go through 14's to 16's to 18's especially the difference between 14's to 18's it starts getting significantly higher. Yeah, and it makes you think then where is, what is the motivation behind that? I mean at 14's level I spend a lot of time with the boys' 14's, again, there wasn't very many withdrawals in the backdraw. Players that are competing, they're putting
themselves through playing the backdraw after they've gone out and getting a lot of good experience and a lot more match play in the types of conditions that Florida in the summer offer. And it's great to see the competitive level is high and then now you start segwaying through to 16's to 18's. There's a big switch and I know there's multiple reasons. I mean let's go to coach Mick here.

05:38

M: I mean I was just gonna say a lot of times with the parents of a 12 year old, two things. Number one, if you look at the rankings in the twelves, then you look at the rankings in the eighteens. A lot of those guys who are in the top 20 in the twelves are not even in the 18's anymore and one thing I tell my parents who are really concerned about ranking is like, Hey, college coaches could care less how good your kid is at 12. They care more about how well your kid plays when he's 16 or 18. That's probably why you're seeing more of the dropouts in the older ages because they know that there's people watching them now versus in the twelves where it's like, Hey, just think about where you want to get to when you're 18 don't worry about the 12's, let's develop that until you get to be 18. 18 is your goal not 12 and a half or 13

06:16

L: Well, that makes sense. And I, and I think that it, it always comes back to the priority. What's most important, right? And at that stage, uh, in, in now the, the young persons has some decision making power. Probably when you're 12, you really don't, you play it because your coach or your parents tell you to play. They don't see the benefit because they feel they need to win now, they need to perform now. So therefore, why would I do this? I don't see the benefit. Why am I going to play more? Well, I'm not going to benefit myself by doing this. So that it always comes back to what, what priority, what, what need or what urge needs to be fulfilled first. Right. And it that stage where you're making decisions about colleges and uh, it's time to perform. When they're out of the draw and they're in a backdraw, they decide not to play because they don't see the value in it. What's your greatest need? And that is to move their ranking up to, to win a tournament, to show the college coaches that, uh, they're one of the top players. Well as well, I mean at the, the older age group, especially the 18, we'll come back to this were the opportunity costs, whereas in those younger age groups that is seen as a lot more opportunity and worth spending the money. The older age groups, it's, they've been around the mill, they are about to go off to college. They have an established ranking in UTR that they may, you know, think, I don't want this really to impact it. So they only see costs or not really much opportunity. But if we come back to the title of this, this episode, the beauty of the backdraw, the backdraw is really where character is built. I mean there was, there was one player that we've seen come through our team USA camps and he went out fairly early in the sixteens but he was that played nine matches.

08:00


08:01

J: He grinded through the backdraw and you know, speaking to that boy's dad and I know that coach pretty well. I know that that dad encourages them to want to play as many matches as they can and keep building on their
experience, keep working at their games. It's a long longterm development is the process to just keep getting better. And I know that coach is sending the same message the coach tells all of his kids, you are playing the backdraw, cause the backdraw is where the character is built and you've got to go out there and compete and continue to build your game.

08:31
L: So in just in, in the, because I, I believe that Johnny, I do believe that. And I think that, again, going back to what's most important, is to developing the character of being a competitor, being resilient, being tough, being professional, being respectful, all these things I think play into this. You're respecting the game. When you play in a backdraw, for example, your expat respecting opponent, you're respecting the tournament director, all these individuals who make sure that this tournament runs and goes off and is a good event for everyone. But I guess to play devil's advocate would be to say, well really what's, what's in it for me? If I have to play nine matches, now I'm going to need to take a week off because I don't want to be dog tired. It was hot as blazes during this tournament. And how is that gonna impact me for hardcourts right? Cause which is only a couple weeks away. If I need to take time off cause I played nine matches and now I'm taking that time off where I could be immediately get on the hard courts and training. What would you guys say to that?

09:35
J: Yeah. No, I mean

09:36
M: That makes sense.

09:36
J: It makes sense. But I spin it to you this way. So if we had, if you had a normal conventional draw, so one and done or one and maybe play one block, backdraw match and done, the players that are going deeper in the tournament's are probably playing what, six seven matches, right? To win the tournament, these bigger draws, now these 256 draws and the older age groups, I think it's on, it's 128 for the, for the 12’s, they have to win seven matches, right? Is it seven or...

10:03
L: At 128?

10:04
J: No, at 256.

10:05
L: We're going to be at eight right?

10:06
J: Eight. Eight matches to win. If you go out early and had only played two matches, how can you, and so you're the person who's winning the tournament or going deep in the tournament is playing at a certain level and you as a player that are trying to reach that level, how are you supposed to catch up if you're only playing two matches per tournament? But yet the winners are the people that go in deeper in the tournament are consistently able to play six, seven, eight, nine matches.
L: Yeah, that's the point. That would be the counter argument is that you want to prepare yourself for what it's gonna take to win one of these tournaments, right? So you're going to have to play seven, eight matches. But if you never put yourself in that situation, you don't know what it takes and then it's gotta be in the way you do it. So if you're going to be in a backdraw, playing with intensity, playing with engagement, playing to win by competing like a champion is the way to go. Because if you were in the main draw, you still hadn't lost, this is the way we'd hope you'd give about it. Right? That you would play with your total engagement. Mick, I mean, what do you think?

M: Well, I think if you're, I always use the phrase when we were talking right there and saying, Hey, if you're really bad at hitting forehands, hit a bunch of forehands. If you're really bad at writing with your left hand, write with your left hand a lot. If you're having a lot of trouble in matches play a lot of matches at that stage and I think for me, when I listened to you guys, it's gotta be the coach because the coach has to give me the mindset to say, look, this is a great place. I just played really poorly in that last match. Now I have a chance to overcome that and see if I can do it in this next match in the backdraw. That just gave me an opportunity. That's the way I always looked at it as a player. I wouldn't think of it as a nuisance that I had to play another match. That just gave me a chance to say, look at, I know I can do this and I'm going to show you right now.

L: We always talk about the importance of practice and I truly believe in that, but if you've prepared to play a tournament, you've put the training in, what more can you get out of it then to put yourself in that situation and try to adapt and change what went wrong in the previous match, right? I mean, this is a great opportunity as you're saying, Mick, to, to roll it back out there and say, okay, let's see if I can figure this out. And that's not even talking about the, the character aspect of that, the resilience, all the things that I mentioned before that here's a situation where it's very easy to be, I don't want to be here. And if you make the choice to play, a lot of these kids still don't fully engage, right? We know that and they don't compete to their fullest. So here's one of those, what I would call tipping points in, in development where, okay, you got this backdraw in this, in this national tournament. Let's see what you're made of. I'm going to support you. I'm going to work with you through it, but you've got to bring it, and this is the challenge that's in front of you. And it's a great character development opportunity for a young person. I can imagine when I was 16 I dunno, I hope I would've said I want to keep playing because I was extremely competitive. But a lot of these kids, instead of being competitive, try to protect something that's out of their control. That's the biggest issue.

M: And my coach always said, it just goes along with it. They said you should be more concerned with building your character than building your reputation, which means your reputation is, is your ranking. He's ranked top 10 that's your reputation, you know, and that's why you drop out. It might be, but your character building that's more important than your reputation.

L: If I, Oh, go ahead Johnny.
J: Well, no, I mean that was a really interesting word you just used, they're protecting something. So I'm going to spin this to a generational thing because one of your mentors, Dr. Dan Gould, you know, they came and presented to us on generation Z, this i generation. I really strongly believe, I think a coaches' and parents' biggest challenge over the next decade is going to be how they help their child manage failure and how they help build up their confidence to be resilient competitors. Because again, the new generation coming through with this early gratification, easy gratification, right? I need to have it now. There's short gratification for things and the ability to be able to go and do something. Like, I'll give an example of a computer game, right? When we grew up playing a computer game, if you died in the level, you had to go all the way back to the beginning and start again, and then you had to come all the way like super Mario, right? You have to go all the way back to the beginning and then it's monotonous. You know, you have to be patient, you have to get back to that level you died at, and then figure out how you're gonna problem solve and get back over it next time. Now when you play a computer game, if you die, you just go right back to that position right before you die. And then just go through it again. So that perseverance, that patience, that ability to kind of think, problem solve and think through something is diminishing because of whatever reasons, right? That we heard about with social media or just the way that culture and society is driving, driving this new generation. So the biggest challenge that we're going to have as coaches is being able to bring these players, their confidence up to a level where they're able to manage failure better. Because the backdraw really truly as seen by these players as, oh, if I lose in the backdraw, that's failure on top of failure. So the thoughts of a player or a kid or teenager to even think about that is kind of incomprehensible, is we can't think about doing that. I can't fail. Right? I don't want to fail. I can't. I'm not going to do it.

L: Well, let's talk about you. The one game in the world cup that truly doesn't matter in some ways is the third place game. Right?

J: Why did you bring that up? Why did you have to bring that up? Just knowing that England was in that position. Oh my God. Okay, let's hear it.

L: Well, no, I mean, you watched that game? I'm sure.

J: Yeah.

L: Do you feel like the English side went all in against Belgium? Yeah, by the team that they put out. What I thought was impressive about the decisions that the manager made was the, in the group stage when Belgium and England played, they both made huge changes. Belgium made nine changes. England made eight changes to their starting team because they were already through to the next stage, the group and you know the knockout stage and so it was more of a case of resting players and give other players opportunity, right, cause there's, there's nothing to lose, you know, they're both going through to the next round. When they got to the third, fourth playoff, they both fielded maybe
only made one or two changes and may have been due to injury, tiredness, cramping in the previous rounds. They both fielded at both Belgium and England strong teams, which tells me that they want to finish that tournament's on a high note and they still working on something because otherwise they would've just put all the players in that hadn't had a chance to compete and give them the opportunity. But they didn’t.

16:36 L: In that situation at an international level, there was still decisions made based on development based on character. I mean to me that’s why they must keep the third, fourth playoff. I mean if you ask every fan or probably everyone in England, they probably didn't watch to their third, fourth playoff because like we already lost in the semis. It’s a national mourning day when we went out and, and it's like nobody cares about third, fourth playoff. But that's from a fan perspective. You ask the managers, they might be a completely different perspective. Now, I didn't read any interviews on on the significance or importance to them of winning that match, but the players still cared. The fans still showed up to watch the match and the managers fielded strong teams.

17:13 L: And I guess the point I'm getting at is a competitor shows up, engages in battles, right? And if you want to develop your competitive character, all that, um, I'm super competitive. I'm extremely competitive. You're not, if you don't play the backdraw now you may have some real reasons, maybe an injury or there's another reason that we can rationalize that maybe we don't play this backdraw, but as a general principle in my mind, you can't just be competitive when the only thing you want is still on the table. You have to be competitive no matter what is put on a table. Does that make sense? So the, I don't want to play this backdraw. I'm playing it and I'm going to find a way to win this thing. Because that's who I am.

17:58 J: It's the work you do when nobody's watching. You know that, that to me is, that is the big difference.

18:03 M: That's your character.

18:04 J: So if we, if we went back and there's some, you know those, these coaching forums that are out there, one person posted the backdraw from 2003. Okay. 2003 same size. Draw 256 guess who won that backdraw?

18:16 L: Johnny Parkes?

18:18 M: Well, it was some big player obviously.

18:19 J: It was John Isner.

18:21 L: Oh wow.
J: John Isner, he went out and then he came through the backdraw, won it. It is no surprise and it, and it's obviously correlated somewhere. There's connecting the dots. There's, there's no surprise that John Isner is making semi-finals of Wimbledon.

L: Right. It's part of the formula that makes him who he is and these experiences cannot be devalued because, just the fact that you would go out as a young person and put your whole heart into something when you're tired, when you're sore, when you've been beaten and the very thing you want is no longer on the table. You cannot win the tournament, but the character in that, because there's going to be times later in life where someone's going to say, you know what? You got to do this. You're not going to get any benefit really for this, to be honest, any immediate benefit, but it's the right thing to do.

M: Right. Just speaking on that too with Nadal, when he was hurt for a number of months, he came back and someone actually asked him in a press conference, I said, do you miss the winning? And he said, no, I miss the competition. I miss competing.

L: You know, and I think one of the messages that we need to be expressing a lot to our, our team is that there's gonna be adversity is going to be situations we don't like. One of my biggest reflections are the last really five years and just coming from Wimbledon, is that like anyone is good when things are going well, when what we want is still on the table when things aren't going well, that's the test of your character, right? And this is what we're talking about, the backdraw blues or you know, the beauty of the character building that can occur in a backdraw and you cannot fully develop your competitive character if you do not put yourself in that situation. And so as a coach or as a parent, I need to think about the longterm ramifications of this. Now again, like you said, Johnny, there's other decisions. There's the hotel costs, the food costs, the, you know, all those things. But if I'm already in for one, I'm in and this happens a couple of times a year. Okay? Then I'm going to go ahead and I'm going to take advantage of this character opportunity. And then how do you build character? You don't just send the kid to the lions and say, good luck with it. You support them. So how do you support someone that's going to be put in an adverse situation? First you talk about it, you expect it like, Hey look, this is coming. It's not what you wanted. I understand that. Let's talk about it. What are your thoughts? Let's talk about it. What are your thoughts? Let's accept because we're not going to compete unless we accept the situation. It is what it is. Crap happens. I lost. I am not happy. But here's an opportunity, as you said, coach Mick, right? For growth. So I can accept in that sense that, okay, here this, it is what it is. I can't go back and change it and I accept how I feel. I'm angry, I'm frustrated. I'm disappointed but now there's an opportunity for me to grow from this and I need to embrace that. I need to take this on and understand it. And so we need to prepare our players for this situation and really communicate why they would be in this situation and support them through it and get them to embrace it. And then we needed to debrief and reflect on these experiences. Like, Hey, you just went through a match where you played three hours where you cannot win this tournament anymore and
you put your guts out there and everything you had. I am proud of you. Talk to me about why you did that. What kept you going? Because these are the things or if it doesn't go well, it was 6-2 5-0 and you decided to go ahead and retire. What were you thinking about there? No, I, I 100% agree and, actually, Mick, I, I'd actually argue that's a big win, right? Cause if you come through those things, you're going to take so much out of it from, from a mental skill standpoint, from the character building, the resiliency. The toughness, the problem solving, you're gaining all of that, whereas those that decide, choose not to compete and not getting that. So I'd actually say that's, that's winning. That's, that's big winning from a longterm standpoint.

22:21
M: Exactly. That's how I always say it. The big win comes three years from now. The little win comes with you saying, you know what, I played better against a serve-and-volley today. You know, I'm going to do it even better the next time, the next time, but the big win might be three years away.

22:33
L: So let me, I'm sorry, because this is something I'm very passionate about because we live in a society that's about immediate gratification. I have my phone, I can consult to Oracle right now and get the answers. Get what I need. I can get UberEats. I don't even have to move. The issue is...

22:51
M: That's why I'm gaining all that weight.

22:52
L: Yeah, right. All that UberEats, man. The issue is that development of something truly special, which I believe sport is special. It's why I'm in this. All my life have been in, I'll never leave. Takes patience. It takes to long term and, and it takes delayed gratification. And so the lessons that we can teach through these backdraws is that, yeah, you know that carrot's not there. The pizza's not there anymore, but you still gotta do the right thing. The money's not there. The, the glory isn't there, but you still do the right thing. And just if you think about it that way, and if, if parents, coaches and players step back and instead of reacting emotionally. Well, this sucks, I didn't win, we're not playing it back draw, that's stupid. Whatever. Right? Hey, let's sit on it. Let's simmer on it. This is the value of doing things like mindfulness and the breathing and all these things because it starts to really center you and get you thinking about what's most important again. What do I value? What's my purpose? Why am I doing this? But we live unintentionally because we need this immediate gratification. This is what feels good right now. So I'm going to do it. That often is a big mistake. And that if that's being taught, and I don't want to say that's the reason why people take drugs and have other major issues, but it's part of it because I want this immediate high. I want this immediate fix. I need to feel good right now. I just broke up with my girlfriend or boyfriend. I feel terrible. So how am I going to cope with this? I'm going to go to alcohol. I want to go to drugs. If we can't teach them to delay gratification when they're younger, knowing that it's going to be a challenge cause they shouldn't be able to delay gratification when they're younger that well then how are they going to do it when they're older and they're just going to make decisions off of emotion and we know that that's prone with errors. Prom with big mistakes. So I would argue also it's hard in
those moments with people because it's so immediate. But let's, let's take a
breather, let's really kind of reflect on what's important. Let's be mindful of
every decision that we're making and let's come back together and talk about
what's the ramifications of not playing this backdraw. And then I think if you
take this approach and you explain it to the player, like here's why it's important
that you play because of all the growth that can happen. I'm most interested in
you in who you are as a person, as a competitor, than I am, that you can win this
tournament. So again, as we step back, I think it's important, it goes beyond just
the fact that people are pulling out of backdraws and not playing, which looks
bad and he's not ready, respectful for the game. But what are we teaching
young people? Are we really teaching them the delayed gratification that's
necessary to really survive in this world?

25:40  J: Yeah, 100% agree that the, we have to teach those skills early on because the
other thing that you're seeing, those players in the older age groups start
making the decisions for themselves, right? I mean, you brought that up earlier.
They make the decision whether they're going to play or not. Sometimes.

25:55  L: Probably more the boys than the girls unfortunately. But yeah.

25:58  J: Well what by the evidence, 53 versus 44 in terms of withdrawals or no
matches to completion that would suggest that. But the hope is, the, as, us as
coaches and parents and teachers or whatever is we do a good enough job with
them in the younger age groups that they do value that backdraws so that if
they're ever in a position where they are making that choice, whether they play
or not, they choose to play because that message has been ingrained in them
that this is the beauty of the backdraw. You get to keep playing, you're still in
the tournament because you're able to go out onto that court, compete, play,
problem solve, figure out how to get better. You know, there was a couple
players, I mean players that we've had in, in multiple camps and it was nice
enough that their parents let me talk to them and I, cause I heard rumblings
that they wanted to pull out. They, they lost. And the immediate thought after
losing is obviously they're upset, they're sad, and they were pretty emotional
after losing, the immediate thought is, I'm too tired, I'm going to pull out, right?
It's the easy way out. And so I, I'd sat with them and I kind of in, in Larry Lauer
fashion, I ask a few questions and then I like to sit and listen and really listen to
the words they were saying. And one of the things that came out of it was this
perception that they had of what others think of them, right? It was the no one
cares about the backdraw. It doesn't mean anything, you know, blah blah blah.
And I had to kind of, you know, I did, I cut him off short and I said, who cares
what anyone else thinks? It doesn't matter what I think. It doesn't matter what
anyone else thinks. It matters what you think when you walk on that court. And
when you walk off that court. And I said, if you play the backdraw, I'm not
expecting you to see, see you jumping around fist pumping the air, Rafa style
and go around. But what I do, you know, you don't have to be happy, but you
can be proud of yourself. I know you're sad because you lost in the main draw
and you feel you can compete to win the tournament. But if you could go on in
the backdraw and still compete and still do it in a manner in which you can be
very productive and get something out of it. Again, you don't have to walk off
court happy, but you can walk off court proud of yourself that you are able to go
on there, play with confidence, play and put your skills to the test and then you
were able to walk off it. Win or lose. You don't have to be happy all the time,
but you can be proud. And that is the one message I wanted to send out to
these players was be proud of you. And that's what matters is, proud is what
you are of yourself. I'm proud of you for stepping on the court. Okay, great. Are
you proud of yourself for the way that you dealt with it when you're on court?
And so, again, that is something that needs to be internal, right? There needs to
be innate within themselves, it, and it really, truly doesn't matter what I think or
anybody else thinks, what matters is that player truly believes in walking on that
court, and gets something out of it when they walk off, they can be proud that
they put themselves on the line.

28:56
L: But you got them to play with that conversation.

28:59
J: Well, luckily maybe somebody else did. Luckily the, as time passed, they
hadn't pulled the trigger of making the decision. But my job was to make sure
this, this conversation actually happened after this person won their first round
of the backdraw.

29:13
L: And they were thinking about pulling out.

29:16
J: Yeah. And they did it in a manner in which they got through it. They won, but
they were sad mopey, you know, and the first thing I asked him after he came
off and won, I mean, he was so sad. He looked like he lost, his dog had died or
something, you know, and it's, it's, he was still thinking about the previous
match. Could've won that match. If I won that match or would have gone on to
play this person and I feel like I had a chance against that person and blah, blah
blah and going, dude, you just won. You just won a match in the backdraw. Okay
you did. But you didn't do it in a manner in which that was, there was the way
that you would like to play. And I posed the question to him and I was like, do
you want to feel like that when you're on the court? And he went, no. I was like,
so ask yourself that question when you're sitting down at the change of ends.
Do I want to feel like this? And if the answer is no, then the great thing about
that is that you have the choice to do something about it. Yeah. You have the
choice, and that is where feeling proud of yourself is where you can make that
choice to walk on that court, get something out of it, walk off the court, win or
lose. You can be proud of the manner in which that you competed to a high
level within yourself.

30:23
L: So now this is values based coaching. You're teaching values because if
someone values something, than it, it's important to them. And ultimately what
I know is that competitors compete. Great competitors compete in practice.
They compete in training, they compete in matches, they compete when it looks
like the match is over, and they compete when they're in control of the match,
that's what competitors do, right? This is their character. They battle, they fight,
they keep trying to play their game, they keep problem solving, they stay
engaged. And so I think the message, it's a great message, Johnny, and I'm glad you did that, because I think you helped that young man, is that if you want to be a competitor than, than make that choice, value that more than anything that I compete, because that's what competitors do. It's what Michael Jordan did. That's what he brought to the bulls, right? He's a competitor, right? And you look at all these great athletes talked about Rafa, Mick, right? I mean, he competes. It and it doesn't matter with Rafa, he's down a set and a break or if he's up a set and a break, he's competing, he's following his routines, he's, he's figuring things out. He's sticking to his game. He's playing with high intensity, high focus, high energy, the way he should be. Not everybody is Rafa, but in your way, you need to be your best self. And here's an opportunity to practice that. And when we don't give them that opportunity and they're gonna need help to go through it, because a lot of young people, probably myself included when I was that age, because we're disappointed with losing, would go out and take those emotions with us on the court and thinking, I shouldn't be here. I should be still playing for the title and this is awful. And it's, that's normal. I would expect this from a young person, but we're going to talk about this. We're actually going to change that mindset. And now what you're doing is you're, you're creating values within them. I always compete and I always bring it, it doesn't matter the situation.

32:19

J: It also really showed me and highlighted that these kids really do value what people think of them, you know. I know that's already always been around people that always thinking about how others perceive them and what they think. And then some of the words he used kind of led me to believe that that was real, you know, that was on his mind and walking around the tournament and just listening to other players interact with other players and them saving face almost, right? Yeah. I'm not playing the backdraw, who cares about that. And then there's players that are pulling out the backdraw, but then sticking around to play doubles. I mean to me that's just completely unacceptable and it's, I just don't think that's right. And then...

32:58

L: It's ego protection.

33:00

J: It's ego protection. And again, this is why I come back to say our biggest challenges coaches and parents is going to be able to manage the failure. Because again, I don't know about you, but when you look on social media, I don't think you see people posting about their failures, right? They post things about themselves. Look how cool I am doing this and I've done this with this player or done this with this person. But no one's ever...

33:23

M: Yeah, I've seen a few of those.

33:24

J: Yeah, I mean, you know it gets to a point where you have to switch off from all of that cause you're just thinking, okay not everything is this perfect. Right? And this is what I think social media is, is creating this perception that we live in this perfect world because we are only posting good things, right? We're not posting the things that we fail at. And I actually think, I mean, and I think we can
all do a better job for any of us that are on social media and you know, for whatever reasons that they are, we should do a better job of actually posting the, the journey of how we fail and lose and how we actually then overcome that. You know, when you don't see that very often and because of that there is now, I mean it can all, again, everything connects in one way or another. So linking back to things like, well this person was saying about, Oh no one cares and a, you know, he's worried about what others perceive him and it's like, listen...

34:16  M: Yeah, that's his reputation he's worried about.

34:17  J: You're worried about your reputation, but I'll tell you what, you're actually strengthening your reputation by walking out there competing hard and walking off. Because again, the backdraw or the beauty of the backdoor is where character is developed.

34:29  M: And how many of those kids were just hoping to get into that tournament in the first place. You know? Then they lose a match and then they back out. You see that all the time as a director or just disrespectful to the tournament, you're not committed to the tournament. If you do that, and as a tournament director you see a mom and a player waiting there at 8:00 AM waiting for their match and the kid just never shows.

34:48  J: See that, that to me again, it's unacceptable. And again, it's the only reason that I can think that that happened. Not the only reason. There's obviously multiple reasons, but one of the main reasons that that happens is because probably that parents or that person that does that wants to make it seem like they've hung around for the event and the, Oh, something went wrong last minute and now I've got to go home. Well that happens a lot. It's so unfair.

35:14  L: What you're saying. They already slept in their bed last night.

35:17  M: They paid for a hotel.

35:17  J: Exactly and then they called in the tournament the morning, you know, 10 minutes before they walk on court, their opponent who stuck around, paid another hotel room night and whatnot. They now got up, they got prepared ready to walk on court for the match. Oh, I'm sorry. Your opponent didn't show up. They got magically sick last night. Now come back in, you know, four hours time and play another match and then it might happen again. Now that person's thinking, well, this could happen again. If this keeps happening over and over, then why should I stick around? Now the opportunity costs is there is only costs because I am here, I am ready to play and now my opponent consistently is not showing up and pulling out last minute and it's my mum and dad that have to go and spend an extra three, four, 500 bucks for me to stick around another day or two in the hope that I might get another match. That to me is a very real thing too in that that to me would discourage me from wanting to stick around so it
becomes this cyclical process where there's definitely a lot of players out there
that have this mindset that we're talking about that do want to go on and do
value it, but they're the ones that get cut short. I just don't think, and you know,
and especially in, I'll come back to this one point, if you are a player out there
that pulls out the back drawer but sticks around to compete in doubles, that is
so unacceptable to me that you are willing to play dubs and step on court, that
you're healthy enough to play doubles, but you're not healthy enough to play
singles. That to me right there sends to me that all you're doing is ego
protection. Maybe, you don't have the character values that could one day lead
you to be a professional tennis player.

36:56

L: Well, I think that that's such a great point. Johnny. If I were to talk to
someone in that situation who had had done that, that we'd have a discussion
about it of course. But one of the points would be that you missed out on an
opportunity to get better. And when you don't compete, you create a habit of
not competing. So when the next time comes, are you also going to tap out and
not compete? It gets a lot easier. I mean that's, that's what we know about
habits. So when you break a habit or you create a new habit and that's of, of not
competing, it's gonna get easier the next time to make that same decision? And
that's certainly not what we want for American tennis. And we can only hope
that out there. Parents, coaches are sending this message, play, get better,
improve yourself. It doesn't matter whether it's the main draw, whether it's the
backdraw, every opportunity is a learning opportunity to get better. And so, you
know, I mean, I think this has been an, you know, a great discussion. I mean, to
me it's something that I was very fired up about when I left the tournament.
And you know, I'm wrapping my head, I'm talking to people trying to get
everyone's different perspectives and I think it's great to have these discussions
and I think it's good to talk through some things. I think it's also really important
to see the value from a character development standpoint and understanding
the beauty of the backdoor and not just having the backdraw blues. But as we
wrap up here, let's go around the room. I mean Larry and coach Mick, one piece
of advice on the, on the topic we've been discussing that you could give to any
players, parents, or coaches out there. You know, let, let's, I'd love to hear it.

38:24

M: The one thing that kept popping in in my mind when you talked about failure
and during the last hour, the first thing I wrote is what do you call the major
league baseball player who only gets a hit 4 times out of 10.

38:36

L: Ted Williams.

38:36

M: The best player in major league baseball, they only get to hit 4 out of 10
times. He's the best player in baseball. And tennis is one of the few sports
where you can win less points than your opponent and still win the match.
Failure is huge in tennis and in baseball it's huge. It's how you deal with that
failure and take advantage of that.

38:55

L: Yeah. Great point. Mick. I think one of the things that I would end with is that
I think we all as parents and coaches want to have resilient, confident
competitors. We want that no one's going to stand in front of me and say, I don't want that for my child or my player. But to develop that quality, those skills in young people, you first have to have adversity, you have to have failure, and if we continue to protect our kids from those situations, then they can never develop the qualities that we would want to see in them, so let's get over, America, kay, I'm speaking to everybody in America protecting everyone's self esteem. It's time to let our kids fail on the small stuff, which, losing at clay courts, I'm sorry, but that's small in the grand scheme of things so that they can learn and put them back in an environment so they can exercise character and making good decisions. And as I mentioned before, support them through this. Don't just draw them to the lines. They all right, go compete. You know, or I'm going to be upset at you. No, it's not how you do it. Say, look, I know this is hard. Let's talk about why we're going to do this. Let's do it in a right way because you're building habits. You're a competitor. We believe in that. But what I know, Mick and Johnny, at the end of the day, competitors compete. If someone tells you, tells you they're a competitor, then they darn sure better be showing up competing when the opportunity's there.

J: Don't just talk the talk, walk the walk. Right. Uh, my piece of advice would be to, uh, anytime that little negative voice pops into your heads and you know, it's not the right thing to do, don't let it take over. Override it. I always used to call it the little chimp, the little Chimp in my brain that is just gnawing away at me, telling me, you know, don't do that. Don't do this, don't do that. And I'd be like, no, it's not the right thing to do. If you can, if you could, the end of the day, you're able to look at yourself in the mirror and feel proud of yourself for what you did. I mean the choices that you made, then you've made big, big strides into the potential future developments of where you want to get to. If you cannot look yourself in the mirror because you didn't make the right choices, then that tells you something right there. And you remember, it is a choice. It is not forced. Sometimes it's forced, but it is a choice that you can make. And the key over time is to make more right choices, than wrong choices. So with that being said, I really appreciate it, coach Mick. Thanks for uh, for getting on our podcast. Coach Mick has a podcast of his own, the PTM podcast, a very, very good podcast. Gets a lot of guest speakers on. So go on and check that out. And that's it for today's episode of compete like a champion. For more information, visit our website playerdevelopment.usta.com and you can email us at teamusa@usta.com, this is Dr. Larry Lauer, and Johnny Parkes signing off until next time.