Welcome to the compete like a champion podcast. You're here with mental skills specialists, Dr. Larry Lauer and coach Johnny Parkes. Today's episode is called breathe and believe. And we have a couple special guests here for you. We have lead national coach for women's tennis, Eric Cortland, and we have national coach, Mo Diaz for men's and women's tennis. Guys, thanks for joining us.

M & E: Thanks for having us.

J: Alrighty. So I guess before we get going, we'd love to, I guess that we'd all love to know your journey on how you got to be where you are now and maybe some of the things you, you kind of took along the way that that's helped you be the coach you are today.

M: I started in 2013 in New York at the center there and I was a part time coach for the center and I was helping out with player development doing a, it's what's called the feeder program. There was an afterschool program and in 2015 I became a full time national coach on the men's and women's side. So I was working with basically 14 and under, um, men's and women's. And you know, we had an afterschool program there from four o'clock to eight o'clock and ranging from ages eight to 13 and from there I moved to Carson, California back to LA. And I'm running the program there. Similar basically full time program there from the morning and the afternoon.


E: Well I was a private coach in California. Uh, I've been working a lot with the Jose Aguirez, our former director of tennis. Um, and in the process of doing that, they were going to start up a program in New York. It was a nine to 13 year old program. I was going to be afterschool and we were actually gonna have tryouts for it and it was gonna be the first time that it was actually a paid program for player development and was going to be in conjunction with the national training center. And we were also going to be teaching some of the coaches that work there as well and have them work into our program. So Jose called me up and he knew I had a good, good situation in, in LA, but, uh, he thought that I'd be good to go out there and actually run the program. So, um, I got hired on as a national coach, uh, in New York in 2013 and we went out there and we started a what was called the feeder program and the idea what the feeder program was to also integrate, um, mental skills as well as strength and conditioning along with parents skills. I mean we worked with, with Dr. Lauer, we worked a lot of different things to introduce these young kids and parents, um, into a new type of program that we were doing in hopes with the ideas that um, they could potentially transition into what would be our full time program. From there, I actually, uh, moved up to women's tennis and working with the age group, 2000s and team USA juniors. And currently I'm working with team USA juniors,
girls transitioning to pro tennis. And so we go to some transitional pro tournaments as well as the, the grand slams,

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J: Nice full range of coaching abilities right there, nine to 13 and now the transitioning through to the the tour. That's great. What are some of the, what are some of your kind of core philosophies on how you then coach or teach as you come through? Like with that experience that you just mentioned?

02:58

E: For us, uh, the idea is, uh, trying to develop a, a complete player and working on many different skills. And for us, uh, we look at it kind of as a performance model. So strength and conditioning works in conjunction with mental skills, works in conjunction with tennis. Uh, and through there we feel that all those things are interconnected and that way we can almost accelerate the learning process through whether we're working on something with mental skills, um, whether we're doing it with tennis or, or fitness. And we found there's a great connection between the mental skills and the fitness part of it. And, and it's a way to now not necessarily put the whole emphasis on the kids playing more, but a a way to actually work on some of these tennis skills and mental skills through, through the, the mental skills and the conditioning.

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L: This is a relatively new phenomenon, right? Because it used to be the rainy day exercise. Go in, meet with a mental coach completely separate from the court. Right. And then come back out to the court when the courts were ready or that day was just a mental day. Right. And it was separate. So this is a completely different for me, a way of looking at things. And how do the players respond to that? Do they, do they like that more? They like it less. Do they like it when it's separate? What do you see from the players who are going through this?

04:03

M: I mean we started pretty young with the, the feeder program and we've just starting with nine year olds and starting to introduce them to journaling, to mental skills. So it was, we were trying to change the culture right away and it was, it wasn't like, Oh, mental skills was, you know, the rainy day activity. It was okay, this is part of how we're going to become a professional tennis player now. So now it was just as important as tennis, as the physical part. So it was all combined and I think they started to accept it and it was, it helped them on the court and we could monitor and see what they're doing in their in between routines and you know, what they're doing, what they're thinking, you know, on the changeovers. So it was great to see the nine year old and you know, embracing it right away.

04:44

E: Well, it's pretty interesting too, when you're in New York, there's very limited court time to be able to play. And so, and all the parents there into, uh, you know, they're very set on what their schedule is going to be. And unfortunately we were seeing a lot of kids that were losing some skills with playing other sports. So for us, um, this was a way for the conditioning point of view is we can introduce other sports. We could then also, uh, introduce the mental skills and we felt like because they're playing these other sports and they're adding the
mental skills, it actually accelerated the process to teach them new things with the tennis as well. So we felt like we were in a lot of ways, we were fast tracking a lot of things and we were covering certain areas that, that weren't being covered. What used to be covered in schools or you know, when just being an everyday kid when you were younger. Um, at least when I grew up, I dunno, I'm pretty old, so.

L: Careful now. You're not that old. There's some old people in this room right now.

f: The cool thing now with the, the older girls is we've also, you know, we're, we're trying to introduce the idea of what it's like to be a professional and we're trying to introduce things, you know, like a preseason and how to do training blocks. And so now if we can put the emphasis on the fact that we're training maybe two fitnesses and two mental skills and maybe only one tennis. Well this last week we had a camp and these girls are saying this is the best that they've ever played. I'm like, well, you're only playing one tennis. How do you feel about that? We're like, well, we feel fresh. We feel like the stuff we're doing in mental skills and stuff that we're doing in strength and conditioning is actually helping our tennis when we're on the court and we're actually getting more out of that two hours of tennis than we would if we were playing anywhere from three to six hours of tennis and doing less of the mental skills or even the conditioning.

J: So they're actually seeing that connection closer together now because I think sometimes the challenge is when we do mental skills off the call, some of them, maybe the younger players have a hard time of connecting the dots of how they can apply some of those techniques kind of right away on the core. And, uh, I know we've talked about this in, in previous episodes, but actually getting on the court where the, I've seen you do this, uh, Larry with, with the girls you're on the call and got she physically going through routines with them and making them understand going through the breathing and going through these exercises. So that's great to hear that they're seeing that connection. Do you think that there is a, I guess like a maturity level or a certain age that you start to see those dots connecting? Or is it more about the right content at certain ages that get them to see those connections so they can buy into to the mental skills training and the breathing?

M: So this week, the past two weeks I'm working with 2005 girls and it's a uh, we'll probably like our third, maybe our third, fourth immersion camp where we're doing two mental skills a day. One strength and conditioning and one tennis. And you know, same thing like coach Eric said, you know, the girls are expecting to play like four hours of tennis and that's what they're used to. They're used to being on the court all the time and you know, just being, using just a mental skills and, and just playing one tennis it, you can see how much they're getting out of that. Just the two hours of tennis. So, and I think from the beginning, well it's been nine days right now. So I think just from the first day through the ninth day, I've seen a huge improvement in the mental skills room with them. So you know, at camp, these girls are 13 going on 14 so I think these
E: Yeah, I would agree. And I think what we're looking for is high quality engagement with the time that you do have and taking advantage of it, I think when, when four hours is always given to you, yeah, it's easy to kind of take it for granted, but they're getting maybe two hours, maybe a little less, and they're having to bring it. And I think that's one of the ideas behind the camp is that it's not just about the tennis. How can you develop yourself otherwise and you know, really making that important as well. You know, I think what's, what's interesting, you know, watching these players go through it, is that the more that that we forced them to do it and the more that they have to work through it and talk it out and we actually have them present their routines to the rest of the group and get feedback, then you start to see a lot of these questions and nuances come out. Even like this morning, right. With, with the girls. A lot of these interesting questions that if you just take routines at face value, like routines are important. Yeah, they're important. Okay, go do them. But now how do I actually do them? Some really interesting questions up this morning Mo, if you remember, 

M: I wasn't in that room. 

L: Oh, okay. So you were there for awhile. 

E: Well the, the cool thing too is how you're applying it across, not only the tennis, but in the strength and conditioning. So it's one thing that talk about routines and you want these kids to be able to do them. But if you're not actually practicing them through every single thing that you're doing it, they're not actually, they're not connecting the dots to be able to do it. So, I mean it's great that Larry, you've, you've even gotten them doing mindfulness, you know, as they wake up, uh, you've got them doing mindfulness and breathing right before they go out and they play and, and they're now starting to put all the pieces together because they're applying them over, you know, whether it's strength and conditioning, whether on the court, whether we're dealing with life skills. And so now they're getting a better use of actually having to apply it and actually practice it. Otherwise, I don't know if we'd get enough practice in to be able to do it. I mean they hit 10,000 forehands but they may not necessarily work on what their routine is going to be. 

L: So what then, if you could tell us what would, what would a typical day look like in one of these camps? Cause I think the listeners are probably thinking, well, okay, how do I do this? What does it look like? 

J: How to fit it all in? 

L: How does this look? What's the schedule that you think works best?
M: So my schedule, um, the girls wake up about seven o’clock. They eat breakfast 7:30. Um, they do journaling at eight. Then they meet with Dr. Lauer from eight 30 to nine 30. They have half an hour break for a snack. From 10 to 11, they’re doing strength and conditioning. Um, then they get a break, uh, from 11 to 12, sorry, 11 to one. Then they do athletic development with coach Johnny, and then they play from 1:30 to 3-30. They have a half hour break and four to five, they’re back in mental skills with Dr. Lauer. So it's still, it's a good amount of things throughout the day. It’s not, nothing is crammed. I, which I like, I think I like the half hour breaks in between, so nothing's rushed. So they have time to go from the gym to the lodge and they don't feel like everything is crammed in one day. I think we're trying to get as much as possible in in one day, and this, I think this is a great schedule for their two weeks.

E: And they're tired, aren't they?

M: And they're tired and you can, I mean definitely in the mental skills you'll see them start to fade, but we do a lot of interaction. We do a lot of talking. So that helps and.

J: Keeps the engagement high.

M: Totally. Yes.

J: Yeah. I think the break in the middle of the day, I mean we've talked about this before when looking at schedules, sometimes it gets so crammed that we don't give the kids enough time to actually digest things, comprehend it, and then be able to come back at it because they're so worried that they've got to go from one thing to the next, to the next, to the next. So these bigger breaks in the middle of the day. Larry, can you just speak to like how crucial those like two to three hour gaps in the middle of the day are and maybe what the kids should be working on, whether they're working on anything or whether they're literally just switching their minds off. What, what would you like to see in those two, three hours of resting?

L: I think it, it in mostly rests. So eating a hydrating, a resting, um, we do want them to have a good break so that they come back to the afternoon refreshed, ready to go. Cause it is a long day and it's easy to, uh, what I would say bonk at the end because you've been going, going, going and so definitely taking the time to rest, uh, you know, and some will even take a nap, uh, which I think is great.

J: You would promote that?

L: I would because I think that that 25 minute power nap, uh, is very crucial for coming back, being alert, um, having energy, you know, I think so. You think you get more from them when they do that. And not everybody likes to nap or can nap, but if they can learn that, I know napping in other pro sports is, uh, is a
must because you're, you're playing at seven o'clock at night or a 7:30 starts. So you, you're gonna nap during the day for tennis players, you know, as they become pros, you start to see that become more part of their routine because they are, you know, often playing later. But you know, I think having that time, and again, the goal is really to, for them to be a pro and to act like a pro. So having those breaks and being able to bring it back and being ready to go the distance of the day I think is important. But now I think back to, you know, Eric and Mo, your experience in New York and this may maybe will resonate better with our listeners, but you had, uh, with that feeder group you had a constrained amount of time that you had with them, right? It wasn't that you had 'em from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM, you had to, you had 'em after school or, and they were coming in and you had them until in the evening. So there was probably a, a feeling that you needed to cram everything in and yet you were still able to do the journaling and the mental skills. How did you work that all out in that kind of environment?

E: Uh, w w we had two groups. Uh, and so we split the groups up. And first we had, some of the kids come in from four to six, but it was really a four to seven spots. So four to six they would do tennis. But from six to seven they had, um, mental skills and conditioning mixed into one. And when we were fortunate enough to have a strength and conditioning coach, that was also our mental skills coach. So he could then also do a lot of the mental skill stuff along with the conditioning. So with that first group going four to six with tennis, the second group would then start their fitness and mental skills from five to six and then they would get on court from six to eight. Um, we were fortunate enough to be able to have good numbers. You know, we, we'd never had more than three kids on the court. Uh, we always had one coach per court and we usually had a coach roving. So there was also a position where we could, you know, take some of the kids individually on the court as well, whether we're tossing or hand feeding and also get the kids to work cooperatively together. Um, whether they're hand feeding to the other players as well. So it was a good mix to be able to hit enough tennis balls. It was a good mix to be able to get the athletic skills development that they needed. Um, which is a big thing that Johnny's starting again with, with the kids now. We were fortunate enough to be able to do those things just because of how the system was set up. And it was, it was a cool incubator program. I mean it was the first time that we ever really done that and we actually, uh, we came in and, and we did a test on it too. And, and they, they actually, you can speak a little bit better for research that they did on that to see if it actually was working. If we took them from nine years old all the way up to 13 and we'd see it if the, the mental skills was working in the athletic development.

L: Yeah, we did an evaluation study of that program and the results aren't out yet. They haven't been published, but we got favorable results and those will be coming out this year hopefully, you know, so that that's coming later. But you know, when you look at it, a lot of times the coaches will say, okay, all right, mental coach, if they have one, go take them, do your thing, and then I'll take them when they're on court and then S & C, take them. That's not at all how you
work. And you mentioned the performance team, right? But how do you see your role in, in this kind of team approach and what does it acquire? What does it require from a coach?

E: Well, I mean, I think it's very important that everyone understands what the performance model is. Because you're going to have all these different people. When, when you're a player, you have parents, you have, you know, if you get better, you're going to have agents, you're going to have S & C, you're going to have a physio, you're going to have the tennis coach in the beginning it's very important to identify what everyone's role is and where they're going to participate within that. Within that performance team, usually you have someone who's the lead of that performance team. And a lot of, a lot of ways it is driven by the tennis coach, but it's very important that everyone in part of that team works together. Everyone knows what everyone else is doing. Everyone knows what their role is. You know, as a leader of the team, it doesn't mean that, you know, what you say goes, you actually have conversations to see what's working, what isn't working and, and that way we can actually do what's best for the player. Uh, I think sometimes when you work in silos that, uh, everyone's kinda doing their own thing and then certain things aren't actually being addressed. That's what's cool with the performance teams that we're doing here is I know exactly what, what Johnny would be doing with his players if he's doing athletic development because we're talking about what's working on the court and what isn't working. And then it's a, it's a way for me to be able to be on court with Johnny to see, well, I can now learn and I, and I can be part of that and learn what's going on with the athletic development. I feel like I've gotten so much better in mental skills because I'm in all the sessions with you and now I can also apply those things that we're learning in the classroom than on the court. Um, the strength and conditioning coach can come in and then apply those things in strength and conditioning. That way everything is getting worked together and we're actually achieving some goals. Whereas a lot of times, you know, you see everyone has kind of their own goal, what they're trying to do within their silo, and at the end of the day, nothing gets accomplished.

M: Yeah. I think we're lucky as coaches that we're able to see and participate in every, you know, in every department. Like it's so great that we were able to participate with Dr. Lauer and the mental skills. And then I can watch coach Jen with the girls and then I can watch coach Johnny what he's doing with athletic development. And then we had the tennis part where the S & C coaches will come out on court. So I think we're super lucky, you know, to all work together and it's just, it's all about communication. And you know, when we were doing the feeder program, we were having a performance team meetings with the parents, with parents, with the coaches was trained the conditioning all in one room and with, but it was without the player at that time. Right? Yeah, they're too young. Yeah.

E: I think to go with Mo's point, the important thing is we were including the parents as well. Um, a lot of these players are going to spend more time with
their parents than they are us. So the more that we can educate the parent and
they can be part of the team and also feel like they're contributing, um, and the
better communication we have, then the better it's going to be for the player.
Um, and then that way it doesn't feel like everyone is against everyone else or
everyone's working in their own silo, but they're actually contributing to what's
best for the player.

18:02

J: Yeah, and you guys do a great job of, of really, I guess upscaling your
knowledge in these areas. I mean we can't all be experts in every area, but one
thing we can be is have a generalist mindset so that we can take pieces of like
Larry's mental skills programming of, you know, what we can control with
athletic development, the tennis skill development, how they all do combined
together. So you guys do an unbelievable job of combining that performance
team model and, and clearly from what you've described to as it works and it's
in the, sometimes in the best interests of the player because that may be all
that you have access to sometimes. Right? I mean, not every player is going to
have access to an S & C coach, a mental skills coach, tennis coach and
nutritionist and all that. So sometimes we have to upscale our knowledge to
help them as best as we can, but knowing that at some point if really we need
to take it to another level, then yes, then when you get to that certain level, we
may need to seek out the expert. But one thing that you guys haven't
mentioned that I, I've been super impressed with you guys about is, is um, is the
breathing, a lot of the breathing, the focus that you guys take on the breathing.
And I'm gonna, I'm gonna, I'm going shoot it over to Larry here because one,
one concept that I absolutely love, and it's a very simple term, but the depth
that you can go into, but the breathe and believe again very simple term, but
the complexity surrounding how you can structure that breathe and belief to
get them to perform. Can you just speak a little bit about how what you do with
the breathe and believe and then, and then we'll, we'll kind of take it back over
to, to Mo and narrate with how they're incorporating that.

19:28

L: Well I think it begins with understanding that focus is the currency of high
performance. I think Peter [inaudible] said that a USOC so our, our goal is to be
focused in the present on what our task is and committed to that plan that we
have and then having positive energy. That's what we try to do when we show
up at the baseline every single time. And so this breath and believe is one
example of a refocusing routine that allows us to move from one place and
become present again. And I believe it's our breath is one of the few things we
have control over on the court. There's a lot of things we don't control. We do
have control over our breathing and our breathing and engaging in a
parasympathetic system. We're able to begin to lower our heart rate, slow our
breathing so that we can begin to think more clearly. And have a more flexible
mind because the mind under stress on a higher emotion tends to zoom lens in,
zoom in on what's uncomfortable and it gets locked there. It can get locked
there. And so the more that we're breathing and, and, and again, the purpose is
not to be overly calm. You're not gonna be calm like you're sitting at home on
your couch, but you're going to be in an optimal level of arousal or energy so
that you can then do your job, which is a, a is a very physical, uh, vigorous job of
playing tennis, right? So you do have to have a lot of energy, but it's being able to apply this routine with your breathing to get to that optimal while we would call our green zone, our green light. Um, where we always want to be, right, or optimal performances happen. Um, so that breathing, you know, it's, it's the, the main thing we have control over on the court and it can allow us to center ourselves, quiet our mind enough that we can begin to think about our game plan, commit to our game. And at the end of the day, my experience is working with professional and junior tennis as well as other sports that we can be nervous, we can be angry, we can be whatever. But if we're focused on our game and we're committed to it, we can perform. So really the goal of that, of the, the breath and belief, for example, is to get the mind back into present on the plan. Our breathing is something that allows us to hit that reset button to allow us to refocus. And one of the things we've tried to do with the players is to teach them what it means to breathe. Um, because I think we obviously know how to breathe, where we learn that, you know, it's instinctual, but we don't know how to breathe for performance situations, how to breathe to create a reset or refocus. So I know Mo and Eric have studied this quite a bit as well. Maybe you want to give us your thoughts of what, what you think is this kind of breathing that allows you to perform a, you know, and either stressful or high performance. Now they're fighting over who's going to get the [inaudible]

J: Rock, paper scissors for it.

E: So each and each coach at the USTA, they have, um, an individual independent, uh, sorry, independent developmental plan, uh, or individual development plan. Uh, that's through our Dr. Lubbers, Uh, who's the head of coaching education. And part of my plan when speaking with him was to go out and, and, and seek a mentor. And when we were discussing it more, we felt it was important for me to find someone that's a mentor that's outside of tennis. Uh, and so I started to look at some other athletes who are revolutionizing their sport, who are innovative in their sport. And two of the people that I came up with were, um, Laird Hamilton who happens to be a big wave surfer and his wife, Gabby Reese, uh, who was an Olympic volleyball player. Gabby Reese would be very important for me because she's also a female athlete and I work with female players. Uh, in the process of that, they actually have started a company called XPT, uh, who's headed up by their director of performance, PJ Nessler and PJ, uh, has spent many years working with MMA fighters. And for them, the, the breathing is very important because you got guys that are so hyped up and ready to fight and yet they can't control everything that's going on. And next thing you know, they're all over the place and they're wasting all this energy. Someone like Laird breathing is very important because if you don't breathe then and you don't know how to breathe, uh, then you're surfing a hundred foot wave and you could potentially die so that they've come up with a, a breathing curriculum through their XPT. Um, and to your point, it's talking about performance breathing and optimal breathing. Everyone has to breathe, but are you using it to your benefit? And unfortunately, a lot of people don't really know how to optimally breathe, a lot of their breathing is mouth breathing. It's, it's shallow breathing. It's not deep diaphragmatic breathing. And
so in the process of, of these kids getting scared and freaking out, they're short breathing, they're, they're elevating their, um, their senses, they can't think properly. So we actually had PJ come in, uh, during preseason for our pros and some of our young athletes and they actually put together a whole breathing curriculum for us to actually teach us certain types of breathing, whether it be box breathing, where you're doing holds, um, where you're learning to control your breath, uh, or triangle breathing, whether it's box breathing, it's whether you do four holds and breathe in, breathe out triangles, three holds, um, or three positions where you breathe in through your nose, you hold, you breathe out through your mouth, you hold. So there's different variations that you can do it and you can breathe faster, you can breathe slower. And the whole process between us is, okay, can I get my heart rate up? Can I get revved up? Am I ready to play? Can I bring my heart rate down? And there's a lot of studies that are being shown that I'm learning to be able to, um, train at hypoxic levels. Whether you know, you can, um, hold your breath or do exercises with algorithm anaerobically. There's a lot of things that are showing that there's some invest, invest in fast mints with uh, how they're actually performing. And the cool thing is they were showing some of our athletes how they're putting them in heightened situations and they're teaching them to actually to breath properly. And next thing you know, they're bringing down their heart rate much faster. So imagine you're a tennis player and you're playing this long point and you only have 24 seconds to recover. Well, how are you going to get your heart rate down to be able to actually go out there and perform again? So it was pretty cool process and they've also found a way to actually put you in a safe environment to heighten these, uh, senses, whether it be in a pool, you know, in 13 feet of water and you actually have to learn how to breathe properly or you're going to start freaking out. And how do you calm yourself? Or they do like a lot of hot and cold therapy. So pretty cool.

25:30

L: You know, I think about the connections here cause we're tennis players or not surfers or, but I remember back to our US open this year and it was over 90 degrees and the humidity was very high over 90% probably right? And you had players getting sick and and, and cramping and all these things were going on. And, and my advice to the players was, was first of all obviously hydrate and get in the shade when you can, but go to your breathing. It's naturally what you have with you on the court, right? To help you to bring that level down, slow your heart rate so that you can go longer. Essentially you have the energy plus with the breathing of getting more oxygen in, right? So oxygenating the blood in a way that you're getting more energy is, is extremely important in a, in a long hot ruling match. And so a lot of times you will see players who cramp, but it has something to do with this stress level, this ambient stress level they're carrying throughout a match versus being able to what you've just heart rate variability. Bring it down and then bring it back up. Right. So they're not carrying that across over time, which they, they eventually, they run out of energy, they start cramping, they start struggling. Um, you know, so I think that if, if the coaches listening to this, players, you're wondering why, why the breathing, I mean when we get in those extreme environments, we also are going to the breathing aren't we as one of our key strategies. But we also, we bring it back to
younger ones, coach Mo, how do we teach this to the young ones and how do we demonstrate how important is to them when they’re not? Maybe they’re just in a practice environment. It’s not an extreme environment.

27:12
M: I think we have to introduce them to simple breathing from the beginning was as soon as they wake up in the morning. I know we were talking about, you know, a lot of box breathing like we do with them to begin the day and simple exercises as holding in for three seconds, holding that for three seconds and then exhaling long breaths out for, you know, four or five seconds. So just starting that day where it’s okay, they’re mentally prepared for the day. They’re starting, they’re resetting, you know, that’s, that should be a daily habit that they have. And you know, just making it a common, you know, common habit through, you know, just like when you’re brushing your teeth, this is what I’m going to be doing every single day because that’s what’s going, going to reset me for the day and start my day. And, and you know, it’s almost like a positive, you know, you look, you know, I use it today when I, as soon as I wake up at that’s, that’s the first thing I do is I have a five minute meditation and you know, and then it’s, okay, I’m done. I’m good for the day. I’m like, I’m ready to start, start the day. So I think it’s great for, you know, these young girls to, to have it and to, you know, be introduced to it. And I don’t know, I think it’s great for them.

28:15
J: Well the interesting thing I’ve seen you doing this week as you’ve been, I’m using heart rate monitors for the goals. And I think when you see someone starts to use heart rate monitors, you start thinking about, well my do I want to see if they’re working hard enough and things like that. But you’ve been using it as well as a way to help them see how, how quickly they can recover and then implementing and the breathing. Can you speak a little bit about that?

28:36
M: So I’ve been putting them in pressure situations where they have, they’re playing point play but it’s some sort of adversity. So I have them start love 30 in the game or they only have one serve or they have to win three points in a row to win the game. So it’s, it’s, I put parameters on set play and I look at their heart rates and, and then I say, okay, they play a long point and I see them go to the back fence and, and I say, okay, you can’t, you can’t start the point until your, your color. I think it’s blue or green. Most of them are doing a really good job of, of starting the point where their heart rates down about 60% and they go as high as 90% and they’re going full out. And then I say, okay, your heart rate’s about 90% right now let’s, let’s do our in-between routines. And they go back, they do their debriefing, they’re calm, they reset, and then they go onto the line. So that’s a great, you know, tool that we have that we’re fortunate enough to have the heart monitor. So I can see how, you know, number one, how hard they’re working. And then number two, how fast they’re recovering. So that’s a huge, you know, great resource that we have here.

29:40
L: I think it's great because now in a couple of different ways, one, we see a players never getting up to 70% 80% so what are you doing here? We’ve got to get more physical, we got to be a more vigorous, we got to apply more of
ourselves. And then also that heart rate variability, can we get it down in 25 seconds? So again, going back to what that's doing is it allows them to think a little bit more clearly. And one of the things that we always talk about is having a clear plan for the next point, which needs to relate to your vision of your game. Well, if you're running at 80, 90% and you're not dropping that much, it's really hard to think clearly. I mean, I do this exercise with players and camps all the time. I'll say, okay, you got two tasks. One is breathe as fast as you can and as shallow as you can and then try to visualize a 10 ball rally with your game style and about 95% of the players can't do it.

J: How many shots can they get to before they just all, if you can remember, when they're doing that exercise?

L: Maybe one or two. Yeah, they have a hard time really going through. And again, it just shows what's happening at those higher heart rates at that extreme level of stress and pressure. And do we train for that? Right. And are we training for that? And I think at the youngest levels, while we can't put too much stress on them, they're still developing. We do need to prepare them for it. Right. I always believe in teaching the young players or young kids things before they can know exactly how to use it. Like I, I teach like even my children, certain things, and I'm not quite sure they get it yet, but when the time comes it'll be a lot easier to get that lesson through then if I've never talked about it before.

E: Well to that point though, it's, it's pretty cool with, with the heart rate monitors, you actually have data right there and you're showing the kids and they can actually see where it's actually working. So, and that's the, and that's the buy in, right? I mean, the hardest thing is there, they're not necessarily going to do, most athletes won't do something if they don't buy into it or see that it's working. Well, this is actually showing them that, look, your heart rate was up here were, you know, were doing the breathing and it's bringing you down so you can actually see it. And it's objective. It's not us saying, Oh no, you need to do this because it's going to help you.

J: Yeah. And it's being smart with it because we've done it with, with a group of boys before and they get really competitive or they want to see if they can get their heart rate up to like 100% and how long they can keep it there. And it's like, okay, well you know the smart thing, you gotta be smart with how you train with it because you, we have to put them in the uncomfortable situations of creating stress in order to see how they react to it and how they respond to it and the more situations we put them in, then we get to see those responses improve over time. So if we can get their stress levels up enough and they're working hard enough on the court, then we do get to implement the breathing and the in between points routine that much more because they've obviously become much more important so that we can bring the stress levels down that we can breathe so that we can keep pumping more oxygen up to the brain so that we can start thinking a bit clearer. And so the importance of being able to
get them to that position, I think again, we use it as a tool. We don't use it as a way of all our training. It's just a tool, but.

L: Or, or as punishment.

L: Or as punishment. I mean, part of our, our part of our purpose of what we're trying to do with the players and we got to take them there so they're not scared when they're there in a controlled environment. Cause when they get scared, they tend not to take action or they tend to panic essentially. And so not as similar to the, maybe putting people underwater, right. And, and, and holding weights and walking or doing breathing. Um, we're trying to work on that response. When that heart rate's up, how are you going to respond? Right? And, and you got to do that in a responsible way, but we need to put them in those situations. And then you know, your brain is, is gonna want to say, Hey, look back off, back off, back off. That's its natural kind of governor to keep you from doing anything on safe, right? But there's, as we've seen, there's a lot more that you can do where when you don't push the edge, right, where you're not really pushing yourself and you're training where you're just kind of comfortable, right? You gotta get into the uncomfortable zone.

J: That's a great way of looking at it because once you do, when you're on the water and you run out of oxygen, you free cow and you get to itself this, it's scary. Like you start losing your breath. It's scary. Now think about when you're, we want, you want to, obviously as athletes, you're out there working hard, but when you start running out of breath, it triggers that response, right? You got a little scared. And so, you know, okay, you're not under water, so you're potentially not in that dangerous position, but you get scared. How'd you manage that? How do you deal with it? You know, what are the strategies in place? So it is, you get that you can't, you can't out breath. You probably get a little scared that you can't catch your breath. Like what do you do?

L: It, it has happened for us in matches, um, where we've had players, what they call panic. I wouldn't say there's been too many full on panic attacks. There's probably been a few, but it has happened. And probably what happens more regularly is that players get uncomfortable and they dial down too soon. And so when they dial down their physicality, uh, they're not as physical, they're not moving as well. They're not as alert, they're not as committed to their game, you know? So this dialing down that we see is a real problem. Um, what you see from the top of the game is they don't dial down. They keep going. They can, but they're really good about, again, if we go, you know, they, they have great abilities to push our heart rate, bring it back down and then go again. Right. They're not just carrying their heart rate at 80% throughout cause they know they'd crap out. So they're able to recover really well and then bring it again. I, I'd imagine part of what Rafa has to do is he needs that 25 seconds cause he goes at such an intensity level that he has to have that time to recover, to go at that. Cause I mean if you watch him, especially when you watch them practice, you absolutely crushes the ball. I mean the guy's a physical specimen and so you know, you're going to need that time to, when you're going that high, to bring it
back down to start that again. But I think for the players, and we even talked about this with them this week, is that this understanding of energy and how it's at play and how you want to modulate that energy and the heart rate monitors allow them to get a real look at that. And how they're producing, you know, a work essentially and how that's being shown up in their heart rates.

35:47

J: Yeah. I've just a quick thought came to me. I mean it's fine. I mean it shows you how important breathing is when companies get involved with it. Cause every hour my bloody watch just starts barking at me telling me to breathe. So obviously breathing is pretty important and I'm going, no I'm not going to do that. And then I get stressed and I freak out.

36:04

L: And he freaks it.

36:06

E: Then he comes to you.

36:07

L: He comes to me.

36:07

J: Now I go to Larry's [inaudible].

36:10

L: And I'm like, get outta here man. I got real work to do.

36:12

J: Awesome. Well, you know, so Eric, I want to come back to you because every morning, you know we like to get to the gym early and work out and, and do my thing. And while as I'm in there you make me very jealous every morning cause you get all the maps laid out for the girls and it's great to see them cause you get him in that before the crack of dawn on there in there. And then I'm out there on the assault bike, literally struggling to breathe and you've got the girls lying down there and first time I saw it I'm thinking he's brought the girls in right out of bed in here before the sunrise and just to lie down on a mat. But then when I come off the assault, I can see what you're doing. You're taking them through all these different breathing exercises. The very first thing in the morning. I know we, we haven't really talked too much about visualization, but what, how do you incorporate the breathing with the visualization when you're getting them warmed up and prepared for practice?

36:57

E: Well, Larry has actually taught us a lot of stuff with creative visualization and, and the idea of the mindfulness is, um, to actually get them to a point where they're, they're thinking about how they're playing, but they're also engaging their senses. So at a point when they're breathing, they're starting to visualize also, okay, well I'm out on the court. What are the sounds that I hear? Do I hear the crowds going on? Do I hear the guy up in the, the, the fifth bleecker going, you know, drinking too much, or, or, um, you know, or do I hear the sound of the ball coming off the strings? Do I smell the can of the balls? Right? So you're engaging all these senses and you're getting them kind of dialed in for what practice might be. For us the last couple of days, we're trying to get them to be a little bit more physical and to see what their body feels like.
And so when they're out there sliding on the red clay, do they feel what it's like to have to actually get down there and use their legs? And what is that gonna feel like when you actually transfer your weight and you're hitting the ball, um, you know, what does that feeling going to be when all of a sudden you see that you know, that you've hit a good shot and okay, I gotta be moving up there and I'm going to attack. So we're trying to engage all those senses and we're trying to do that to get them started. So at first, you know, people will walk in and they see the girls lying down, they're on their back and they're, they don't really see what they're doing. But in the process of the breathing, it's not calming them down necessarily. It's actually that breathing is getting them fired up to actually get working and it's getting the oxygen, then it's waking them up and it's preparing them to get ready to go. And then we go into our actual dynamic and our stretching and also getting the legs going. And then we actually go out to the court again and we're by the courts and they're actually practicing their routines with their breathing and they're going through that again. They're finding ways, okay, the official just said time and you got to get up and you're ready to start going, well now how can I accelerate my and how can I get fired up and get ready to play? So we're taking them through all those different scenarios, exactly what maybe they would do if they were getting ready for a tournament, if they were right before a match, if they were actually in the match. So we're trying to simulate what it would actually be and how do we apply those things with the breathing.

L: I think one of the things also is that, uh, getting them engaged with their purpose for the practice, right, Eric and, and just really being clear on that and my motivated that I have a purpose for why I'm here and this is what I'm here for and I'm working for that. That why when you connect with that every morning, uh, I know you were talking about kind of the morning routine, right? When you connect with that, why it gives you a different perspective, I think on, on your day. And it really helps you get off on the right foot and excited about what you're doing. And you know, and I don't think we really talked to the listeners about this kind of daily practice, but we're, while we're emphasizing with our players is that daily mental practice that you're engaging in mindfulness, some form of mindfulness in the morning and then you keep that engagement throughout your day from thing to thing to thing. Um, so when you come to the practice core, you don't just show up with a blank mind. You've thought about what your goals are, you thought of what your purpose is, you saw in your mind you felt it and maybe you smelled it and whatever, right? That here's how I'm going to be successful. And then you go out and you work through it and you try to make it as match-like as possible, make it real. And you work through different scenarios. You practice your routines and MTN, you reflect on how you did. Um, and that's one part we will probably haven't talked about today, but like coach Mo, you've gone through a lot of those sessions as coach Eric has as well, where we're reflecting on the day. What is, what is the value that you find from taking the time to actually sit with the players after the end of the day, after the, the two fitness to practice on court. What's the value of sitting and talking with the players? How isn't the work already done?
M: No, I think that you have to, it's, it's, you finished the day strong and you know, I was just thinking, going back to, you know, when I was a captain of, you know, some team events and I would, I wanted to kind of test it out, um, with the breathing and meditation. And I had one team in, in check and before, you know, after dinner, um, I'd bring them into the gym and we would do meditation because it was such a stressful situation, you know, we were in a different environment, you know, we had so much, I felt like the girls had all this pressure on them. So I actually had them each come up with a mantra where we did breathing and they had to imagine, you know, repeating the mantra to themselves, whether it was some sort of goal where they had to, we did it for five minutes, we did it at the end of, you know, at the night and in the morning when I saw them. And this seemed to relieve a lot of the stress. So I think it was such a, it was such a, for me it was, it was huge for me to just even, I am a naturally stressful person and I feel, I felt the pressure and it helped me to, you know, do it with the girls and to breathe with them and to say, okay, just repeat this mantra to myself over and over again. And you start to, it was a positive mantra. It was, you know, something that it was, it could be simple. It was, it's a one-liner that you say to yourself, I had the, the girls didn't have to tell me what their mantra was, but you know, I, I felt like there was, it was a positive goal throughout the end, throughout the end of the day. And

J: Oh, that's awesome. I mean it's, it gets them engaged with that and then it makes them kind of come back to a safe space, which was, which is great. Um, I know we're running out of time here, but before we leave, would always like to get a little tip or something for the listeners. So if you've got some players out there listening or some coaches interested about applying some techniques or strategies, what's a, what's a couple of key tips that you can give to, to some players or coaches start implementing today? Tomorrow?

E: Oh, well, some of the breathing stuff, some, some simple things is to teach them that actually the diaphragmatic breathing. Um, an easy way to do that is to get them on their back and actually have them lift their knees up into, um, basically almost like a 90 degree angle. And when they're breathing, they want to feel like that they're pushing their, their belly button down into the ground, uh, when they breathe in through the nose. And then when they exhale that they're pushing it out. That way, it's getting to a point where they feel like they're really expanding their rib cage and they're getting a deeper breath all the way through. Uh, and the, the box breathing, uh, or triangle breathing is, it's, it's always in through the nose and out through the mouth. And so you can do three second counts. You can go in through the nose for three seconds, you can hold for three seconds and then you exhale for three seconds. That would be triangle breathing. If it was box breathing, you would just do a hold at the end for, for three seconds. So that's, that's a great way to kind of teach everyone to breathe properly. Cause too many times we're breathing through the mouth and a little too shallow.

M: My favorite is, um, I call it 888, cause that's my favorite number. Um, so I do eight, um, slow breaths in through the nose, out through the nose, so in through
the nose after that, then I do eight in through the nose, out through the mouth, and then I do in through the mouth out through the mouth, eight for eight. So I go eight, eight, eight. So that's the first thing and that I will, I do in the morning.

43:27

J: Nice. Awesome. Larry, you got anything else for us?

43:31

L: I've always got lots JP, but I think you, yeah, one of the things that I'm hearing is that when you really work through and you put your mind on something, engage your mind with a process that you can get more from yourself. And so by doing this breathing, you bring your, you bring your mind to the present, right? And you bring your body to the state of readiness to perform again. That's really what we're talking about. If we just bring it to its baseline, we're, we're, we're connecting with the present, we're preparing ourselves to take action again. And I think that's so important that you have to have some routines, some plan that you practice to be able to do that again and again. Cause that's what you have to do in tennis. You have to stop, start, stop, start. And you have to have that ability to do that. You know, I think when it, when it comes to things like visualization and the breathing and mindfulness, um, you wanna teach your players multiple things so they can do different things and figure out what they like, but then they also can vary it over time. Cause if you're asking them to practice every day, they start to get bored with certain things, some of them. So you can have them do different mindful activities, uh, different kinds of breathing. Like you mentioned, you know, some different kinds of breathing already here for our listeners. So, you know, they can practice that. And the other thing I'd emphasize, this stuff is only as good as with the quality of which you do it. So if you do it poorly, then you get what you put into it. Right? And that's what the players have to understand is, you know what, we'll see players, okay, take a deep breath. And it's like, okay, I know that wasn't a deep breath. So what have we taught you? So that's why you have to teach them. So for those listening, it's not like saying, okay, we gotta breathe today. Make sure you breathe. You've got to show them, you got to show them what it looks like. What is the diaphragmatic breath? What are these different breathing techniques that are out there? They're available. Um, we teach them all the time to our players. What are these techniques? And again, finally I press upon everyone is that when you're doing this and you're doing it well, what you're doing is you're bringing your focus to another place, to your breathing, to your heart rate, to lowering that heart rate, to being relaxed, whatever it may be. So that's what your focus becomes and you immerse your mind in the moment with that, you can then have the past kind of disappear in the future disappears and you just become present. And then you get to choose what the focus is. And this is extremely powerful. So anybody who's on here, I can't imagine if you're listening to this, you don't buy into the mental game, it's on some level. But if you are considering whether or not you should be engaging with these things, I leave you with that, is that one of the most important skills we can teach people is to be present in the moment non-judgmentally and to be committed to their, their purpose. And if you can learn that, then you got some true power, real power and needs these skills and routines that we've talked about today are ways to get there.
J: It's money, money material.

M: That's motivating.

L: Money material.

J: Money.

L: Hopefully it makes our players some money in the long run and our coaches too.

J: Absolutely. Well coach Eric, coach, Mo, we greatly appreciate you taking the time. Always learn a lot from you guys and love coming to see you guys out in Carson and, and working with the kids, with you, doing great things out there. So, uh, we appreciate all you doing and uh, keep it going. Right on.

M&E: Thank you, Johnny. Thank you.

L: Thanks for coming on. Appreciate it.

and that's a wrap on this week's episode of compete like a champion podcast. As always, if you'd like more information or resources, please go to playerdevelopment.usta.com and we look forward to next episode.