Does Being Positive Matter? Positively!

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 specialists, and coach Johnny Parkes with the USTA player development. Welcome to today's episode where we'll be discussing does being positive matter? When I think about that as a discussion topic, you think about, okay, other players on court, they're getting pumped up. Are they fist pumping? Are they shouting? Are they slapping their thighs? You know, but that doesn't necessarily always mean me and positive, right?

00:42

L: No, it doesn't. It's the tone. It's the content of, of what's happening. It's, it's not just an expression of energy, right? It can be, um, but there's a lot more to it than that. And as it is the way you're saying things, it's the way you're doing things. Uh, and and to me, like I look at, you know, does positive matter because I think a lot of times we tell players to be positive and be like, okay, whatever. Cause right now, I can't hit my forehand in the court, but if you, if you look at what Kevin Anderson did and the changes he made, I can speak to the tennis changes that he made, but I can see the difference in him in terms of the positive energy that he displays on the court. And this really goes back to last year, right. Where, you know, I think he was a, a great professional and was top 20 for a number of years and seemingly made the fourth round of every slam, right. You know, and was always there but wasn't necessarily cracking through. And, and then you, you go to the US open and here's a guy who's displaying a lot of energy, a lot of positivity. It wasn't necessarily his MO before. He was more of a relaxed and not a lot of emotion and he's displaying all this energy and he ends up making the final, right and, and playing his best tournament. And then has had a number of, uh, successful events since then and played some of the most epic matches right over the last a year and a half. Yeah. Right.

02:15

J: Well, I, you know, we look at the end of season championships in London and I was watching him play Djokovic and he was, you know, Djokovic is running a train over people at the minute and it was 6-2 2-1 to Djokovic and you know, Kevin is still getting, visibly getting his fist pump out, trying to G himself up as he walks to the towel. He's shouting at himself, come on, let's go. Uh, you know, and, and you're thinking, here's a guy that's really, you know, he's just getting beaten off the court right now. But he's trying to find a way to have his behaviors impact maybe the way he's thinking because he's made a choice that he's going to gotta to do something to pick himself up. So he's choosing to create a behavior that may help them turn things around.

03:00

L: Absolutely. And what players do to change the momentum of matches. Right. A lot of times they changed the energy of the intensity of the way they're responding to things. And when I can think about Rafa, he's the ultimate example here where, um, if you go back to his match against a Dominique Thiem at the US open, where he lost the first set at love in about 24 minutes, he came out with extreme amount of energy and intensity, ran out of the
changeover, super positive, uh, at 15 all he plays a point where he comes to the net and hits this inside-out volley, backhand volley at the net. And so it's just 30-15, he's barely won any points and he goes big Vamos fist pump right at that point at the net. We don't think that was on purpose. I mean, yeah, there was an expression of emotion, but he was trying to change the flow of that match and he was trying to make sure the team knew that he was in it and he was, he was ready to fight until the end. And just because he played a poor first set, it didn't mean that wasn't going to continue. And I think about Serena when, when Serena's pushed many times you see this energy, this intensity come out in his big come on. Right. And she gets fired up. And, and so again, I don't want to turn this just into a conversation about who can, you know, display the biggest outburst of energy cause that's not what about being positive, that's not the whole deal.

J: Well it's more of a mindset isn't it? Like you have to make a choice that you want to change something that disrupts the, the rhythm of what you have been doing. Cause obviously it's not been working. So if you're able to disrupt your own rhythm to find a rhythm that allows you to get into a mode that gets you going and keeps you more on a positive mind frame, you know, whether that's, you know, getting the first pump out or whether it's just in your mind when you're doing your routines in the, in between points, your routine of how you're thinking. Is that more of a positive phrase? I mean, I remember. So if I go back to when I play, I remember the uh, transition of what I went through. When you know, you make an error in the net, for example, you go to the net and pick up that ball. What are you thinking as you go to pick up that ball or you thinking, Oh God, don't just miss that second serve. Don't miss a second serve. Or do you make that choice to go, you know what, I know I'm going to make you, I'm just, I'm going to kick it down T I'm going to put it up into his body. I'm going to look for a forehand. Like that to me is more of a positive approach because it's taken the assumption that you're taking missing out of the, out of the equation. Because if I say, don't miss, don't miss I'm, that's a loaded question, right? Or a loaded phrase that's putting pressure on myself.

L: Well, I think one thing that the the listeners must understand is that the brain doesn't compute no and don't in terms of action. So if I say don't double fault, immediately I get a a vision in my mind of double faulting. Right? Right. Just seeing a ball headed net or going long. So that act of trying to avoid something from happening only helps to create what it is you're trying to avoid. And everybody gets that when I say, well, don't, don't think of a pink elephant. And then they have a very hard time getting that pink elephant out of their mind. Right. You know, and, and right now Mick's wearing a pink elephant suit in my mind, he looks great but...

J: It looks great man.

L: You look great man.

M: Nice, guys.
L: So, but the thing is that if you want to change something that's happening to you, when is the last time that becoming negative made the change that you wanted? I really think about that. Not very often is it that change comes from being able to let go of what’s happening of the past and the worries about the future and focusing on the present and then taking some form of positive commitment, positive action, right? That I'm going to do this. And one of the best examples I've seen in the last year, Johnny honestly was in the Superbowl last year, and I know we’re jumping out of tennis, but when the Patriots and Eagles played, the Patriots were slightly favored. And Tom Brady and his team has won so many Super Bowls and Eagles have never won a super bowl. And so that game, the Eagles defense did not stop the Patriots all day and went up and down the field. And fortunately for the Eagles, they were able to make enough offensive plays. They're able to stay in front for a lot of that game. But when the Patriots were inevitably coming back and they're driving the field. I was listening to, uh, this miked up of Malcolm Jenkins, who’s a safety for the Eagles and, and stopped the Patriots. All they had, they had no answer for their offense. And you listen to Jenkins sang, you know, things like, Hey, we just got to make a play. We just got to get one stop. Wasn't saying like, Oh my God, we can't stop these guys. They're too good. We're gonna lose the Super Bowl. I don't know what to do. I wasn't panicking. It was a very much a relaxed, Hey, we're going to make one play. That's it. That's all we need. And eventually they made the one play. Brandon Graham strip sacks Tom Brady towards the end of the game, they get the extra possession, they able to get far enough ahead of the Patriots that they ended up winning the Super Bowl. Right? It wasn't like the defense played a great game, but they, they stayed positive in a game where they didn't play well and they made that one play cause they hung in there and they kept believing we just got to make a play. Right. And I think about tennis where so many times we're judging ourselves early in a match saying, well, I'm not playing well. Things aren't going my way. This is bad. This is bad. This is awful. I should be better when in fact you just missed a shot, which you could do at any time. But it's your reaction to that that's negative and you judging yourself, you becoming negative, uh, that then creates the next miss and the next last point and the next one, and the next one. And so now you've created what you were worried about that I'm not going to play while I'm not playing. Well, yeah, you created it because of the mindset, the approach that you took. But if you look at what Jenkins did in the Superbowl, even though that defense got owned most of the day, they kept it pauses. They just kept talking about making a play. And that made all the difference in winning the Super Bowl.

J: I mean, that's a really good example about how, how do we get players to that point? Because what you also talked about, I mean Super Bowl final, that's a high stress environment, right? So if you're getting your, your butt beaten and down the field and you can't stop the offense, this guy is trusting that they're going to make a play and he's trying to rally the troops around them to make these plays. You know, in, in tennis. How, how do we get to that point where, you know, as players get through to playing the professional tour and then they move on to playing grand slams, how do we get them to a point where these, these stressful environments or the increase of stress as they move through the
levels until they get to the top level of playing in grand slams and hopefully doing well in them? How do they, how do we get the points of them coping with the stress? Being able to drum out the negative voices and being able to be, have helpful comments, helpful behaviors that can help them translate to playing a game style that they want to play. And again, knowing that they're never going to play perfect, but how do we get the mindset into a frame of mind that isn't harmful, especially in stressful situations?

10:11

L: Well, I think, I think the first thing is that understanding of a, for a 14 year old playing in national tournament to a pro playing maybe in their first tour final, that level of stress actually can be pretty similar depending on how they look at things. Sure. So that it's all relative, right? So we all know that that our, our first final is, is big, no matter, you know, if you're 14 or 25 so, so that's one thing. And understanding that, that it's a relative experience, but I believe it comes from training and it's what you do every day. So if you're taking the opportunities in training to be put in stressful situations and to then deal with them in a productive, positive way, you're starting to create the habit of this is who I am, this is how I respond to things. Right? So you're creating that mindset, that habits, so that when that shows up on match day, you're going to go with your habit. You're going to go with who you are typically. Yeah. And it gives you a better shot at then being positive. But if in your life or in your tennis on a daily basis, you're the first one to pull the shoot. Things are bad, things are awful. It's no good. And this is how you think, then that's what's gonna show up on match day as well. When there's more stress, there's more pressure. And it's just going to amplify that. Right. So I believe it starts, it starts in training every day and, and the way you're approaching things, I love it. You know, coach Richard Ashby was on our, our staff here, uh, in player development and we were talking about this with a group of, of players and talking about how, okay, so I don't remember the situation. Maybe it was windy that day and so is going to be a bit of a, a windy day and it could be a bit rough out there. And, and instead of saying, Oh, you know, what is going to be bad, you know, and it's just the way it's going to be. His point was what a great opportunity to work on how you're gonna respond to the wind, right? Yup. And what we've, we've kind of morphed that into whatever it is that if, if you're not playing well, what a great opportunity in practice. Yeah. Because it's going to happen to me in an important match and how am I going to deal with that? And that's what we're trying to get to is that we're using our skills, our mind in practice to deal with things in a good way and staying in the present problem solving committed to our games so that when we get on match day that when inevitably adversity comes, we can fall back on that habit. But if we haven't trained that every day, we have no chance to be that way under pressure. It's not like you're going to make it up when you're under pressure.

12:57

J: Yeah, that's a really good point. And you know, I think we're all very lucky that we've got someone like coach Richard around us with the amount of experience he has. And I love the way that he phrases that this is an opportunity to get better and work on these in tough conditions or under different stresses. And that relationship between the coach and the player is where we can help shape
that mindset, so to speak. So one thing that I that comes to mind with me is, is
you know, all of us come from the UK big football fan, proper football fan, as as,
as the listeners will know, that's what we call it here, Manchester United, who
have been so dominant for years now have been struggling the past few years
and now they have a manager that is very decorated in what he's done at other
clubs. And it as this season has gone on this year has been very noticeable
correlation between how when he uses the media within, he doesn't have a
good relationship with the media, but when he uses the media to basically call
out players and to, to basically say what they're not doing or what they can't do,
that then leads to whether it's pre-match or post-match, that kind of negative
relationship from coach to media to player. The players see that, they hear it
right and that correlation of then losing matches. But then he goes through
periods of time where he praises his players and what they can do and what
they're doing well and where, what kind of style they can play. And often leads
to producing results. I mean, not always, but it tends to lead to a more positive
performance out of his players because of how he is phrased it now. There's
probably a lot of things going on behind closed doors that we don't see or don't
hear. So just from a, a fan from the outside where all we get access to is, you
know, media interviews. But you know, again, like what is that? How can that
coach relationship with the player help impact that mindset? And I think
Richard, coach Ashby puts it down so well as he doesn't really want to know
what you can't do. He wants to know what you can do and what you have the
opportunity that you can do today to improve. You know, how important is that,
is, is that message to hear from a coach and I guess a parent too, right? Is
encouraging them in what they can do and if they're not very good at
something, how can I encourage you to feel that this is an opportunity to get
better? That's a tough perspective for a kid to see, right?

15:15

L: Yeah. I agree Johnny, that's a great point is how are the adults, the coaches,
the parents, uh, really facilitating the development of that positive inner self
talk? Right. And know, one thing you got to remember is that it's very easy to
stay with the negative because that resonates deeper with us. Um, we
remember negative memories more, the negative is a lot easier to hang on to.
Um, we have, if you look at the English dictionary, we have a lot more negative
words for emotion than we do positive. Well, I mean that's just the way it is,
right? So we, the negative emotional experiences is really well defined. The
positive positive is not as much as, it's just interesting how we pay more
attention to the negative. Yeah. And that, that negative inner dialogue. And, and
so I believe in terms of like coaches and parents, you really do want to be
pointing out the positives, but also what can you do about it? So if a young
person's struggling or it could be, you're talking about pro athletes, same thing.
Um, you know, if we're negative with them in most cases, essentially you're
piling on because they're probably already beating themselves up for the
performance. And now the way they show that might be different. Some players
will act like they're cool and it doesn't bother them. Mothers will get really
emotional and upset and others will get super angry and break things, right? Uh,
so people respond to that in different ways. But everybody wants to be
successful. They want to feel they're competent in a given task and given
environments. So typically when we become negative as a coach or a parent, we're just piling on. We're just adding onto it. Like, yeah, you know what, you, you are awful, you are bad. The key is a couple things. Number one is to help them understand how this is momentary. This is not permanent. Just because you lost a match, it doesn't mean you're always gonna lose. And it doesn't mean this is your level forever unless you choose not to work. So the question becomes, what do you wanna do about it and how can I support you with that? Think about that though, Johnny, that's much different than saying, you know what, you didn't make your serves. Why is that? I pay for coach to practice that with you? Is he not doing the job? Is she not doing the job to change that conversation to, you know what, that was a tough serving day, but I've seen, you know, pro serve under 40%. Not too often, but it happens. What are you gonna do about it? Right? What do you want to do about it? That to me is the key. How are you going to go about this? So taking it from blaming to, you know, for me, positive is, is not only encouraging people, but challenging people, right? Encouraging them to, to take the next step, but also challenging them. Like, okay, so you don't like the way you're serving. Uh, you're not making enough. What do you plan to do about it?

18:15
J: Yeah.

18:15
L: And do you need me to drive you over to the courts after school to make sure that happens?

18:20
J: Yeah. You know, it is very interesting. I think if you, you know, all the camps that we do with, with all the juniors and when we do match ups, right? We, we get, they get to do a lot of match play at the camps and uh, when we match certain kids up, you get off against, you know, last time I played, I lost. Uh, and they, they kind of say it like they're not looking forward to playing that, that practice match because they remember the last, last time and I'm going, I'm not interested in what you can't do based off of something that happened months and months ago. I want to know what you can do. What are you going to use this opportunity for right now? You know, let's go back to the ATP, um, you know, world finals, Zverev lost to Djokovic in the group stage two days before, maybe three days before then they played the finals against each other. First set was fairly competitive and then Djokovic steam trained him. How does he turn around in two or three days to then steamroll in? Because again, I mean, Zverev after losing and losing felt really comfortably is thinking, all right, this only happened two, three days ago. How can I beat this guy? You know, he absolutely walked all over me. How can I turn around and beat him? So how do, that's another question to say like how do I get that, those recent negative results and thoughts out of my mind and turn it around? You know, that to me was pretty impressive. I've seen a two, three day period and there have had to have been a process behind the thoughts, maybe the negative thoughts around that loss leading into that final, overcoming those negative thoughts and replacing them with something else.
Absolutely. I think Johnny, that on what you see, one is an acceptance that I can lose, but I can succeed the next time. And, and I think there probably is some very good coaching that was going on there at the same time and giving Zverev some, uh, keys, some strategies, some tactics that made him believe right. And maybe sometimes in the fitness as well. Maybe it's in the mental game, but when a player has hope, they're dangerous, right? And so when you get beaten in straight sets two or three days before and you have to come back and play that same person, um, which is a very unique situation, um, you've gotta be able to point out things that are going to change the course of the next match. One of my favorite questions to players after they lose, okay. Is to say, okay, you know, what'd you think of the match? But if you were to play it again, what's the path to success? Because if you look at, you know, pro players who are trying to break in and, and get into top 50, top 20, anybody who's really trying to take that next step. Zverev obviously took a big next step, right, this past weekend that is, therein lies the importance of understanding. Well, if I have lost, what can I take from it and I need to reflect on, okay, what would the path to success be? Not that just Djokovic is that much better than me. And so there it is. He needs to retire so I can then move into his spot. It's that, okay, there are certain things he was doing. There are certain things I wasn't doing that need to change and I can change those. So it's applying agency where it's being intentional about, okay, if I do these things, it can change the outcome. Right? But to do that, you have to have a growth mindset. You have to believe that your efforts gonna make a difference. Right? And so there is why that that growth mindset so important. We haven't really talked about that today at all, but the idea that my effort can change the results is huge and that helps me, that hope allows me to stay positive, allows me to continue to problem solve instead of getting into the inevitable. And Dweck found that with students who were, were faced with very challenging problems. The ones who had is what she called a, you know, this growth mindset are being malleable. They were looking for ways to figure it out, to adapt to change. Whereas the ones who are more fixed and believed in talent and showing intelligence, when they didn't have the answer right away, they gave in obviously in Zverev's case, you know, without knowing any of the inner workings, they were able to coach him up and he was able to believe in certain things that he could change in the next match up that he saw from the match. He played Djokovic in a round Robin I guess, right? These are the adjustments I make and if I do that, that can change the outcome. That's huge right now. Again, if you're, you're thinking about your coaching and player, what does that mean for you when they lose, instead of looking all the negatives and all the things they did wrong, talk about like you're playing chess, like, okay, so they're doing this to you, so what do you need to do? Right? Or you need to take this out so you can do this. It's a much different conversation. But that's a, that's a rational conversation. That's not an overly emotional conversation. Right? So in terms of coaches, you go back to your man, you example. I would guess the coach when he's really thoughtful and put a lot of forethought into what he wants to say, he's building those players up, right? And trying to let them know that he has their back and that they can get this done. And probably when he's emotional is when some of the negatives come out. Right? It could be done as a, as a a strategy, but many times you know that
that doesn’t work out. And I believe this, you look at juniors or pros, criticize in private praise in public because you don’t want to embarrass a player as you lose them. I’ve, I’ve never believed an embarrassing a player in front of others because you lose him and you, you want to make somebody negative, go ahead and embarrass them.

24:18

J: I absolutely agree. I don’t think that’s a productive way of going about it. I don’t think that’s helping the player recognize a path forward as you say. What is the path forward? So, uh, you know, I, going back again to the Zverev example, he must have had to have made a choice there. You know, he has his coach Ivan, Ivan Lendl was there, um, his dad there who’s coached him all his life. He’s got Jess Green who’s worked with him for six years on his, on his strength and conditioning, his athletic development. And you’ve got guys here that they must’ve had a conversation at some point, but ultimately that player had to have made a choice about what they’re going to do when they go out there. Are they going to let negative thoughts overwhelm them because of something that happened a few days earlier? Or are they gonna make a choice that, that that doesn’t matter? That there are things that I can do that I’m in control, right? The controllables that can have a positive impact on the way that I play so that it affects my opponent so that I can win. Like, so it still ultimately comes down to, so you know, I’ve asked the question about that, that role of a coach on the player in helping nurture that mindset, that growth mindset, but then ultimately they’re still our choice. You can give them the best information in the world, but it still comes down to creating a choice from the player that they want to act a certain way, react a certain way, and then ultimately behave a certain way on the court that is reflecting positively on their game.

25:48

L: Yes. I’ll give you another example. So I used to work in ice hockey as a mental coach and I worked with a lot of players who were aggressive and would take a lot of penalties. And when I saw them start to control their behavior is when they understood that they can control how they’re responding to things and when they took ownership or control over their responses, not to necessarily how they felt. Because emotion, you can’t totally control that. You can’t totally control all your thoughts either. You have to accept what’s there and focus on what you want to focus on. That’s when they, they understood that they start to turn a corner, right. That I control how I respond to things. I can control that. Yeah. And when you gave them the tools to do that, the ability to, uh, use their breathing to calm themselves, to change their thoughts, to be able to focus in the present.

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When you give them those skills to do that, then you start to see a change. So, um, it is a choice, but it’s a skillful choice and you need to have skill to be able to do it. And, and one of the things that I would encourage everybody who listens to this is that whether you have someone do for you, a psychologist, a mental coach, or you have some skill in this, is helping players learn how to focus but also to refocus and change their thoughts. There, there had to be no doubt that Zverev had some doubts about that second match and how it was going to go based on the first match. But I’m sure once there was a plan laid out and the,
the coaches got them and he sort of sorta rebound from that initial loss that, that plan, those beliefs that were coming in about the training that he’s done to the plan they have to playing Djokovic all these kinds of things. His resolve, um, that he started to rally himself like, I can do this. And so when the question mark inevitably comes up that how am I going to do, am I going to lose again, it becomes a matter of, you know what, that’s a real fear. That's okay, but I know exactly what I’m going to do. Here's how I'm going to play this match and I can do that. Yeah, I'm going to do this. And it turns into commitments. So, uh, in terms of being positive, you had to give the person hope. They have to have hope, they have to have a plan, and then they need to have the skill to pull it off. And the, it seemed the ability to be able to catch your thoughts and to be able to change them. So when you’re becoming negative, it’s to be able to catch those thoughts. And I think there’s a couple of important things you have to ask yourself. Number one is what I think what I’m thinking realistic is that what I’m thinking I'm going to lose again today. Realistic maybe because that’s the reality of applying a tennis match is a 50/50 deal. Okay, so that's real. Am I making too big of a deal out of it? Maybe. Maybe because I lost the first match that that doesn’t have to have bearing on the second match. And actually that first loss can inform me enough if I’m Zverev to figure out how to beat him on the second match. Right? So it’s like a match, almost like a practice match. Yeah. That's a way to set up the most important match. So if you look at it in the right way, it actually can turn into a positive. And again, I have no insight or knowledge of what happened in that situation, but I’m just speculating that if I were working with a player that was in that situation, this is what I would do. But if you haven’t prepared them for that situation, now that you can prepare, that you’re going to play Djokovic twice in a couple of days and you'll be playing in the final. But preparing them to be able to go from doubt and fear and negativity to commitment and belief and positivity. If you've trained them to do that, then you can put them in different situations and they can figure it out, right, with your help. But if you haven’t given him the skill, you haven’t taught him how to catch those thoughts, restructure their thoughts, um, by checking is this thought real? By what we call decatastrophizing. You're taking the importance out of things and then refocusing on the most important beliefs they have about themselves. Um, the most important performance cues that they've set for themselves. Um, one of my favorite things to do for a player who's negative is to go back and talk about their vision of their game and their strengths and just have them visualize it every single day and talk to themselves in that way. We get too far away from our beliefs sometimes because we're getting pounded by the losses by, by the misses, by the failures, and we start to forget about or stumbled leaving in our strengths. So going with visualization though, how important do you think it is to go back, especially if a player is struggling with a bit of confidence, there’s negative doubts, thoughts come into their mind. How important do you think then going back over video of matches where they've, they've been resilient, they've come out on top, they've had to go through some stresses in that match, the, that created a, well obviously a positive result. How important you think normally to go with visualization, but having the player watch their own matches, especially examples of where they came out on top.
after going through maybe some tricky situations throughout the match. How important you think that is?

31:02

L: I think it's essential. And today coaches have a great advantage of having video on their phones too.

31:09

J: YouTube.

31:10

L: YouTube too. But again, you can, you can capture so much information and you can use that in a way to bolster up the belief and the confidence in that player, right? We all, we've all been in that situation probably where we were down in a match, a set in a break set in two breaks, right? And came back and won. And what did that do for our belief, our positivity the next time we were out there, right? We get behind early like, well that's no big deal. I was down a set and two breaks. I can find a way and we stay in the present. We stay positive. What happens when we come negative? We start focusing dwelling on the past, which never leads to good performances cause you're not fully focused in the present. Or we start jumping ahead to the future and worrying about the water's like, what if I play this way again? What if I lose? What does that mean? What if I...

31:57

J: Dangerous territory there.

31:58

L: Right? That's because you're already creating a narrative or creating a narrative of what could happen. So this idea of being present. If you want to be present, you have to be really good at being able to accept what is, knowing what you control and letting the uncontrollables go. Cause he ain't got control over it, right? Yeah. Am I allowed to use Zayn on this podcast? You don't have control over it. And then being able to focus on what you're committed to, the work that you've done, your game, your strengths, right? Problem solving these, this is the basic process of being positive. And I remember a player on court, we're in Boca and we had been working together for awhile and this person a had a history of being pretty negative and pessimistic about things. And I was working with this person, we're on court and things weren't going well I believe in a practice match. And, and she said to me as I walked out, she said, Larry, if you're gonna ask me to be positive, I can't do it right now. It's like, all right, but can I ask you to be resilient and fight back? She looked at me like I was crazy. Like, I don't, I'm not going to ask you about rainbows...

33:06

J: Was it that same look that I look at you most of the time.

33:08

L: Yeah, pretty much. Yeah. Like what is this guy talking about? And she's like, you know what? I can do that. I can fight and I can, okay. Pick one thing that you're going to rally around and just do it as best as you can. So I'm not going to come out here like, Oh, everything's great. Everything's good. Yeah. Things aren't going well, but choose something that you want to commit to. Right? Accept that things aren't going well. But that's in the past. Control what you
control, that's you, your breathing, your response, and commit to a line of thinking that's gonna make things better. Being positive. So if we go all the way back to where we started, does it matter? Yeah. It matters because when we're positive, it keeps us present. It allows us to focus on present action, which is 40 years of sports psychology research tells us that being in the present is the most important thing. And if you can be present, which means a lot of times you're going to have to accept what has happened in the past. Move your mind from getting too far ahead of yourself. Back to the presence thing, positive about what you're doing. I can do this, I will do this. I am this, I am prepared. I have trained for this. I have a great serve, my forehand, I could put it where I need to put it, my backhand. I can always make this cross court, whatever it is. You've got to get to those things. So yes, being positive now, I think a lot of times players take it as, well, you know, I'm positive, therefore I am. No, I don't believe in that at all because I think positive, I'm gonna win. No, that's not the case, but it gives you the best shot. Right? If you're positive and you prepared yourself, then you have a great chance to be successful.

J: Yeah, I have to, I have to use this example. This was probably one of the best, uh, pieces of writing I've read from a player. We do a lot of journaling in our camps. I think it's very, very important that that players are able to reflect, uh, you know, set themselves up for their practice but also reflect back on their practices. I think it's a lost art, but regardless, so the journaling we do at our camps, there was this one, one particular player that came in and it's probably one of the best journals I've read and, and obviously he allowed us to take a look at it. And in it we were talking about a specific skill might have been, you know, transition or it might have been something around, you know, hitting a bigger forehand, whatever it will, well, maybe slice, I think it was sliced backhand. Anyway, regardless. And in that he goes, what I want to get out of today's practice is to work on the skill of my slice backhand. And it wasn't so good yesterday and I want to be able to improve it today. And here's the next part. He put it in, he goes, I'm going to improve, I want to work on it today to improve it. And I will improve it because I'm going to do this and that. And I was like, I'm reading this from a 13 year old as I, I think most adults struggle to, to think in that much depth. I struggle with it sometimes, but you know, I'm just a plant pot from the UK. So, but the, the, the depth to go into that, that again, now he, that player is so immersed in getting better. He's got a great growth mindset as well, so kind of goes hand in hand. It's just incredible to see. And so, you know, before I get you, you know, before you finish it up here, Larry were giving us some tips. Um, you know, I want to say one thing to the listeners, just a little piece of advice here and it's something that I read, I can't remember in what book, but it's a very simple concept and it's, if I am having negative feelings, it doesn't matter if it's on the court, if it's off court, if it's, you know, my home life, whatever. It's, there's one simple question I can ask myself and it's do I want to feel like this? Do I want to behave like this? And if the answer is no, the absolute beautiful thing about this is I can change it. So if the answer to the question that I can ask myself is no, I can make a decision on the spot, I can change it and I can make that change now. It doesn't have to wait till the next practice. It doesn't have to wait until the next time I step on a match court. I can...
change that in my thinking on court, off court, my day to day life, walking around, doesn't matter where I am, what I'm doing, I can change it right there, and then. It is a choice that we can make. You know, attitude is a choice. A, a great friend of, of ours, Olly Stevens who unfortunately passed away, a great coach, a great mentor to a lot of kids and other coaches, you know, always talks about this, that attitude is a choice. If I don't want to feel this way, I can change it. And so that's the biggest piece of, uh, of learning advice that I can give to players if they're listening to this or all to coaches in questions that you can ask of your players. Do you want to feel like this right now? No. Well, guess what? You get to change it and you get to choose right now if you want to change it.

L: So, and they have to believe that they can. And if we teach them the skills to do it, they start to realize that they can do it.

J: So breathe and believe baby. So, yeah. So Larry, why don't we do this, I mean, we're running a little bit short on time here, so I'd love for you to maybe summarize what we talked about and maybe provide some tips that, that the coaches and players or you know, parents can, things that they can do and they can start doing right now that can, that can help impact a young, you know, young athlete, person, um, as they move forward.

L: Thanks John. I think it starts with a quote from Henry Ford, those that think they can, those who think they can't are both right. We create our reality and the soundtrack as I call her, our mind becomes our reality. So if I think I'm slow, I'm going to be slow cause I'm going to act as if, but if I think I'm fast, it's not going to make me necessarily fast right away, but I'm going to make the choices to become faster. Right? Just like that young person you talked about who was journaling is going to get better because he's making the choices to get better. Right? So first it starts with this idea that, um, whatever's filling my mind, that internal dialogue is going to become my reality and we have to teach that to our players. And you must understand that. And then understanding this idea, yes, of what do I control, right? So if I accept that I have a lot of these different thoughts in my head and my mind likes to wander, but what really helps me is when I focus on these things, uh, the ability to accept and then to focus on what I have control over. So as all he talks about or talked about, attitude was a choice, right? I choose a choice then making that choice because I know I'm skillful enough to do it right, that I can go to my breathing, that I can change my thoughts, I can refocus my mind, get back in the present. And I spent so much time visualizing my game and improvements that I'm making that I really honestly feel it deeply and I can, it helps me to stay positive. Right? So to me, you know, one of the mistakes we see, Oh, just be positive. Good luck with that. But if I say, Hey Johnny, let's do what you've worked on, right? Take a breath. Accept what is cause it's already done, man, it's gone or do you have control over me? The next thing I do, yeah, you got that. What are you going to do about it? Well, I want to hit this serve the way I know how to hit it because if I do it, I know I'm going to get a forehand that I can crunch. Beautiful. To me, that mentality is important to teach at a young age, but that mentality will also allow players to win. Grand slams. I absolutely will and it, but it's a process. We can't
just tell people just be positive. It's more than that. It's skillful. You have to work at it. Teach kids how to breathe, diaphragmatic breathing, box breathing. These different forms of breathing so that they can become centered and focused. Teach them how to accept things so they can let them go. So they understand what they control and what they don't, and help them learn to be committed and to be focused on their games and what they do well and the positive side of that and taking actions instead of avoiding the things that can go wrong. Right. And the skillfulness of being able to do that. So that's what we're talking about here. And that to me is the best way I can summarize that,

41:35 J: Larry, that's phenomenal. This has been a great chat. So thank you for engaging in conversation with me or it's always great to do this. So for the listeners out there, we hope you've enjoyed listening to 'Does being positive matter? Positively!' The answer is, I bloody hope so. But uh, anyways, thank you for listening in and we hope to catch you on the flip side. For more information you can contact Larry or myself, um. You can visit us www.playerdevelopment.usta.com and any questions you may have, you can always send, drop us an email, larry.lauer@usta.com.

42:14 L: I thought you were going to give them my phone number. I was starting to get worried there for a moment.

42:18 J: 4... no I'm joking. And then yeah, you can always contact me. johnny.parks. That's J O H N N Y .P A R K E S@usta.com with any questions, we'd be happy to answer them and maybe answer them on air here. So thank you for joining us, compete like a champion podcast, and we'll catch you next time. And that's a wrap on today's episode of compete like a champion. For more information and great resources, visit our website playerdevelopment.usta.com and you can email us teamusa@usta.com this is Dr. Larry Lauer and coach Johnny Parkes signing off until next time.

43:16 [inaudible].