

Does Perfect Exist?

- [00:00](#) J: Welcome to the compete like a champion podcast. You're here with Dr. Larry Lauer, mental skill specialists, and coach Johnny Parkes with USTA player development. Today we're going to discuss perfectionism. Does it exist, Larry?
- [00:18](#) L: Well, obviously you're looking at it so we know that it exists.
- [00:21](#) J: Wait, wait, rewind. This isn't a podcast about perfectionism it's a podcast about Mick's birthday, because it was Mick's birthday yesterday, our executive producer. Happy birthday, Mick.
- [00:30](#) M: Thank you.
- [00:30](#) L: Happy birthday, Mick.
- [00:31](#) M: Thank you.
- [00:32](#) J: What'd you do for your birthday?
- [00:33](#) M: Went to the cheesecake factory and I cleaned the shower.
- [00:37](#) L: At the cheesecake factory?
- [00:38](#) M: No, not over there.
- [00:39](#) L: They have a shower?
- [00:40](#) J: Were you walking with your cheese cake after you clean the shower?
- [00:44](#) M: I cleaned the shower first, then went to the cheesecake factory. Last year I weeded for six hours, so that was a bonus this year. It was only like 20 minutes.
- [00:51](#) M: You really did take care of yourself this year.
- [00:53](#) J: Which cheesecake did you get?
- [00:55](#) M: Strawberry.
- [00:56](#) L: Good choice.
- [00:56](#) M: It's the best.
- [00:57](#) L: No chocolate?
- [00:58](#) J: Just plain with strawberries.

[00:59](#) L: Yep. That's the way to go.

[01:00](#) J: That'd be fruity.

[01:01](#) M: It was perfect.

[01:02](#) L: Great. It was, it was perfect.

[01:04](#) J: Wow. It was perfect.

[01:06](#) L: Now we have the answer...

[01:08](#) J: Now he's flipped us back to our title.

[01:11](#) L: Mick has his ways.

[01:13](#) J: Ah, yes. All right. Perfectionism. Does it exist? What is perfectionism?

[01:17](#) L: What do you think it is?

[01:19](#) J: That's a good question. I need to give that some deep thought. I should have come prepared for that. Perfectionism. I think it's the want or need, necessity to do everything without a mistake.

[01:28](#) L: Okay. Yeah. I think that's a good way to think about it. I mean, we talk about perfectionism. It's this unreasonably high standard that you have for yourself and maybe for others that, because it's unreasonable, it's impossible to always achieve. And so in of itself, it's kind of a futile, right? It's frustrating that you, you hold these standards for yourself or others, which can't always be achieved. Maybe sometimes, but in a likelihood, probably not most of the time.

[01:54](#) J: How does perfectionism get formed?

[01:56](#) L: Well, you know, we see, for example, with perfectionism that parents who are perfectionist, they actually, the way that they talk, the way that they do things, there's probably even maybe a genetic role to this. A lot of it is socialization that their children take on the lens in which their parents see the world or the people who are influential on them see the world. And so often if you have a perfectionistic parent, meaning someone who believes that you know, things should just go a certain way and always go that way and it's not acceptable to be beneath that standard that you see children who are often the same way now it's not a, it's not a cause and effect. It's not every time, but you, you see it often enough. And again, I think it's that, you know, that environment they grow up in and in the way that parents talk about how things are happening to them, the way they see their success and failure, the way that they respond to success and failure, all these things in children are listening.

They're creating their own ideas based on what they hear and they're highly influenced by, by the people around them.

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J: Do you have any examples of how we might be inadvertently teaching without really trying to do it?

[03:01](#)

L: Well, geez, you know, if you, for example, now you've got me on the spot Johnny, but if you have a project and there's something you want to do, you want to, maybe at home or something, and you keep putting it off because you just don't think you have it perfectly or it can't be done perfectly. Or maybe the project's going on and it's not going just right and then you just kind of stop and don't do it or throw it out or complain about it constantly. These are little ways that, you know, we're expressing this sort of unreasonably high standard, right? Again, I think it depends on what it is, you know, when, when it comes to a game like tennis, can you really expect perfect? Probably not.

[03:38](#)

J: Yeah. I mean it's so tough and I think you see a lot, quite often in players and children and you say, wow, I mean that kid is a perfectionist. The technique has to be perfect. They have to win, they have, you know, the pressure on to win is so high. They you know, they, they don't put the emphasis, I guess on that effort and what they're putting forward that day. It's more about, I didn't do that right. That wasn't done in the right way. And maybe that's reinforced, you know, again, at the younger age is you see a lot of kids are working on their technical abilities and that's what they're trying to hone in on. And then when they come to competition, the emphasis is so much on getting that technique perfect that they forget about the other parts, which is you got to try hard and you got to compete. Which bring a whole lot of other elements to the game, right. Other than just going on a practice court and hitting that technical swing over and over and over, 300 times.

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L: We have a lot of people who are really good technically, but they, they don't know how to win. And I mean, I think that's an issue because it's a game. And the other part I would say about that is we talk a lot about perfect practice. Got to have perfect practice. Well, is that possible? In fact, is that a barrier to good practice? Because if you're constantly trying to get it just right, are you actually pushing yourself to the edge of what you're capable of? I'll give you an example. Like when I worked in ice hockey, we used to always say, you're not learning until you're falling. So when you're teaching kids how to skate, you have the, I may have mentioned this on the podcast before, you want them on the edges of their skate. And if they're not pushing the inside, outside edges that are skates, they're not going to really become a very good skater. So you know, you, there's people who can skate and never fall, but they're not good skaters. They can't make these extreme cuts go extremely fast. Stop on a dime because they haven't fallen. They didn't have that imperfect practice. You know what I'm saying? So I think sometimes we use the word perfect too much. And I kind of embargoed that word when I got here almost seven years ago. Like let's take perfect out because you know what is perfect? It doesn't exist. You know? I don't think that that... Why are we looking for perfect? We can strive for

perfect, but you're never going to get there. And I think you had the realization that by working hard at something and trying to do it the right way, but being okay with mistakes because you're challenging and pushing yourself, you're actually going to get farther than just trying to get it right.

[05:48](#)

J: Pleased to here you say that when you came here, you wanted to get that word out of our language because you do often hear that on the court when you're walking around any facility and you've got a pro out there working with a player, any level, it have to be a kid or whether it could be at 3.0, 4.0 player out there and they're working on their technical abilities and you just hear the pro go, yeah, that's perfect. Just like that. Great. That's perfect. Do it again. And if you do that enough, you're just drilling that word into their mind so that it becomes about being perfect. It doesn't become about, you know, trying to do the right thing. It is about being perfect.

[06:21](#)

L: And let's be realistic. Adults are, are not as impressionable as young people who brains are very malleable, but at the same time, it is an effect on the person. Right? That all right, so if that's perfect, why can't I always do that? And that's really the downside with perfectionism. The, the good side of it is you have these very high standards, which we want to see from our players, very high standards, but they become unreasonable and they have to be achieved all the time, or it's complete, utter failure. Well, that's just, I mean, life is messy. Tennis, I, as I tell our players, tennis is messy. You're gonna make mistakes. You need to make mistakes, and you need to learn from them. So if, if as a coach or a parent we're talking about, perfect, perfect, perfect, well, you know, I think you're better off talking about specific information like, okay, that follow through was exactly what we talked about versus perfect, perfect, perfect. Because now what if I don't do it right? Well, that's bad. Again, you know, we could make this sound stronger than it is, but when we're talking about children, they're very reactive to the words that are being used to them.

[07:24](#)

J: Yeah, for sure.

[07:25](#)

L: Or used in the conversation with them.

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J: Yeah, absolutely. And they, they, it's often the thing that we say isn't taken the way we said it. It's maybe taken a different way from the kid. They misunderstand, you know?

[07:36](#)

L: Yeah. And again, what are we saying when we're saying perfect that that's the way I want to see it. Perfect. But do they know what that is? Do they know what it feels like? So the information might not be that useful and now you've created this evaluation, this judgment. So the next time when I shanked the ball, that must be awful versus that's the process, right.

[07:55](#)

J: And the reality is in the, for players that are working on a scale, it's going to start off where they're making a lot more errors. It's going to start off being, you

know, looking a lot more rough in their eyes. And that's, that's the whole process. That's the process of learning a skill is we start off at one place that isn't great and we get better at it and we keep working and keep working until we get to a point where we're competent enough to use the skill. But if I, if we're using those words perfect and then every time, yeah, as you said, they don't do something then, oh that's bad. So at the start of it, which is the most important part, the start of a kid's journey within a sport or just learning any skill. If it isn't perfect, then everything else is bad. Well you're going to have a lot more bad than you are gonna have good. So then that that self worth has to go down in that child's mind. Right.

[08:41](#)

L: It certainly suffers. And even if you think about high performance players or pro players, it's something similar where at their, relative to their level where they're expecting something unreasonable, they end up battering their own self confidence because it's never good enough versus being able to accept the times that I did make a mistake or I didn't reach this standard knowing that I have this very high standard but it can't be reached all the time. But if I reach it enough I want to be successful.

[09:06](#)

J: So is the, in tennis, is there a, is there a game score that could reflect perfectionism?

[09:12](#)

L: Well, people will talk about the golden set, right? And in the golden two sets, you know. I heard you almost had, you told me you almost had two golden sets.

[09:22](#)

J: Yeah but that was unfair. I mean it was, it was such a mismatch in skill level. It was when I was young and it was playing a school match and against a kid that you know, didn't play that much and you know, kinda feel bad doing it. But at the same time you kind of want to do it because it's just, you want to get the golden set. I don't know if that makes me evil or not, but I'm going to test you, Larry.

[09:44](#)

L: Test me? I thought this was going the other way. You planned this.

[09:50](#)

J: No, I'm testing you. Who is the one professional that's got a golden set in a grand slam match?

[09:54](#)

L: That would be Yoraslava Shvedova.

[09:57](#)

J: Say it again?

[09:57](#)

L: Yoraslava Shvedova. How do you say it?

[10:00](#)

J: Yeah, that's probably about right. Shevdova?

[10:01](#)

L: No, but anyway, that doesn't matter for this podcast.

[10:05](#) J: So that was at Wimbledon, when was it?

[10:07](#) L: 2012?

[10:08](#) J: 2012.

[10:08](#) L: Against Sarah Errani. A grand slam champion nonetheless. And she got a golden set against her.

[10:15](#) J: That's a rough day at the office that.

[10:16](#) L: Yeah.

[10:17](#) J: All right, so, so looking this up.. I found this kind of funny. All right, so looking up if there are any more golden sets out there. There are a lot of golden sets, but they're done at the lower level of professional tennis. This one fella, I think he's Czech, played a couple of tournaments, futures in 2016 in France and the notes next to his score, 0 and 0 loss, just says amateur opponent, was a golden match.

[10:39](#) L: Oh! That's rough. 48 to zero.

[10:42](#) J: Right. So then a month later he plays another tournament in France, gets beat 0 and 0 again. Okay. Says amateur opponent, Fabian is the guy's name, won one point for honor to avoid another golden match against him.

[10:55](#) L: That poor guy.

[10:59](#) J: I mean I can't help but crack up for that. For honor.

[11:02](#) L: For honor.

[11:02](#) J: It's like we're going into, you know, Maximus Decimus Meridius from gladiator. Strength and honor!

[11:07](#) L: He came back on his shield. Literally.

[11:09](#) J: Literally. I mean, poor fella. But anyway, it has happened. It actually happened quite a few times. The first time was in 1910. The, the, the opponent was Ms. Huiskamp and it says first name unknown.

[11:23](#) M: Mick knows that person.

[11:25](#) J: Miss Huiskamp. Anyway, well, it's happened to her about 10 times.

[11:30](#) L: Well, sorry Tomas to bring that up if he's listening.

[11:34](#) J: We hope you still playing the game, mate.

[11:36](#) L: Yeah, man. Getting better. Yeah, we're here for you. I'll give him a free consultation if he's listening to this.

[11:42](#) J: Winning that one point might've just relieved him of any, any sort of doubts.

[11:46](#) L: Yeah, I mean for honor.

[11:47](#) J: For honor.

[11:48](#) L: Yeah. For honor and country.

[11:50](#) L: All right, let's spin it back around. So what about... You, you gave me some notes here about Djokovic. You wanna, you want to walk me through that? Well, you know, it's, it's something I like to talk with those who self profess that they're perfectionists and who had these unreasonably high standards and beat themselves up, batter their self-confidence, put themselves down. I say, well, okay, let's do an interesting task. I'll say, I want you to go on the internet and find the match where the opponent.. Most ever unforced errors they've ever made and still won a match. Okay.

[12:21](#) L: So I did this for one of my players and we looked at it and we found that actually at the Australian open in 2015, that Novak Djokovic defeated Gilles Simon in five sets. Guess how many unforced errors he made. What would it be?

[12:36](#) J: In five sets?

[12:37](#) L: In five sets, a pretty long match. I mean Simon's was a grinder.

[12:40](#) J: 50, 60.

[12:41](#) L: That's so low.

[12:43](#) J: 70?

[12:44](#) L: A hundred unforced errors.

[12:50](#) J: A hundred? 20 a set if my math is right.

[12:50](#) L: I mean that's pretty much all the points you need to lose in the set, right? I mean, you need 24.

[12:56](#) J: That's five games. That's five games of unforced errors.

[12:57](#)

L: That's five games. And wins. So you can imagine how long some of these games were and these sets, but he made 62 winners, so he had a differential of minus 38 and still wins the match. So what does, what does that tell us about tennis and being perfect?

[13:12](#)

J: That it's not perfect, Larry.

[13:14](#)

L: And it's unnecessary. Tennis is messy. It was meant to be that way. You have two people, mano a mano playing each other. If we're playing each other, your job is to frustrate me and screw me up. So why would we expect perfect. There's another person on the other side of the net. Now I get it why people when they're playing, they put those standards on themselves. And I understand that because maybe I was a little bit that way when I was younger so I can relate. What I don't get is when adults put those standards on other people, right. But it happens. It does happen. You know, and it's interesting because I've been through it in my consulting career, you have a parent who's very perfectionist and maybe in his or her job, it's more of a benefit. I mean, if you think if you're an accountant, for example, or maybe an engineer, this perfectionistic sort of trend could be pretty helpful, right? I mean, when we're talking about details, but think about the task at hand. There's a lot more controllables, right? But now you make that person work in a team where they don't have control over everything on a big project, probably going to get pretty frustrated and be frustrated with other people who work differently and maybe don't have the same standards as they do. We see it all the time in the workplace. But then in tennis, I think sometimes that parents and coaches take the mindset that they have in their work and they try to put it down on tennis. This is how you achieve and you think about, in tennis we have a lot of high achievers in this world, right? Parents who've achieved a lot, they're, they're very good in their jobs, in their, their careers. Right? And it would make sense, right, that you would take the mindset, whatever, how you achieved in your life and you would express that to your child. Right? Wouldn't you? You're going to do that. I mean, I'm assuming, but if it's this idea that no, you actually can attain perfectionism and these unreasonably high standards and when you make a mistake, it's wrong. It's wrong. You can maybe have that mindset in other walks of life. It doesn't work in performance, you know? Yeah, I know, even like figure skating and in gymnastics that you can get a perfect score. But I would bet as you asked those athletes, they would not consider themselves anywhere near perfect when they do their, their routines, right. There's... Little things are always improving. So to me, we have to be careful if we start taking ideas from other areas like business or this might be a little bit more effective. And trying to put it down on, on a sport like tennis where there is no perfect, there's so many variables involved with a performance, so many variables that there's no way you think you can attain perfect. Even I would bet in those golden sets, those players could say, you know what? I bet I could have done this better or I could've done more of this. So to me, if we're talking a lot about perfect, I think that's actually, that's a mistake that we should be talking about commitment and accepting who we are and how we do things and committing to doing a little bit better, taking the next step, challenging ourselves every single day so

that we're motivated to get better, but in a reasonable way. Why would I think if I played you that I should be able to use my forehand to do whatever I want. I'm not as good as you. Right?

[16:04](#)

J: I'd be going for the golden set, Larry.

[16:06](#)

L: There's no chance you would get that because if you got close, I would just probably hit you with my racket and you'd have to default. You'd have to retire. You will not get that golden set against me? But uh, you know what I'm saying though, right?

[16:16](#)

J: Yeah. I mean I think as you were talking then it brought up an example that I saw online with, there was this gymnast. I believe he's from Ukraine and the world championships are going on at the minute I believe in Doha. And this guy, two world championships ago, however long ago that was, I wasn't sure, he was doing this gymnastics routine on the floor. So he's the guy that is on that big massive mat springboard and he, they do double somersaults, twisting around. And then he did this big routine, went through without, you know, went across the whole floor, spun in the air, fell, fell on his bum and he was done. He came in like sixth or seventh, the next world championships later he goes through the same thing. He, he goes for his finishing routine, goes up in the air and he actually lands and then lands on his head. All right? And then, so he's at the world championships this year and he goes through his routine and he hits a great routine. It wasn't perfect, but came in second silver, the guy just broke down when he got his medal and he'd go through all that struggle. He landed on his bum, landed on his head and finished in like 56th and then finally came good and came through it. And usually if you're thinking if you're coming in 56 and something, you're pretty far away from probably winning gold, silver or bronze in anything. That'd be like get into grand slam final. Right.

[17:32](#)

L: Right. That would be like making second round.

[17:34](#)

J: Yeah. You'd be pretty far away. And this guy, you know, that shows that that struggle that you can go through, but had he probably had maybe more of a perfectionist attitude towards his routines, he might've not even made it and got the silver medal. He might have shut it down early. Cause that might've been embarrassing for him. He may have felt that he was being judged so severely that he, he didn't want to face the world, right? But, uh, you know, and I think sometimes you see that in tennis and players make mistakes. They kinda looking over, especially in the junior is they're looking over at their peers and go, did they see that double fault? Did they see that very bad shank over the fence. Oh my gosh, that's so embarrassing. I don't want to see my friends or maybe potential future opponents see that bad, that bad shot that, you know. You see that a lot and you're just thinking, you know, stay kind of within yourself, true to yourself and keep focusing on each shot and you know, each point and that goes by it's, yeah.

[18:22](#)

L: Yeah. And it's tough to perfectionist because that voice that's in there, that judge is so strong, the judge is so strong and constantly at work and laying down judgment that was good enough, that was not good enough. This is a constant for the perfectionist and it's very difficult for a perfectionist to be present, right? Because they're constantly laying down judgment of that was bad in the past, so not good enough, not good enough, and what does it mean for the future? Right? Can I actually live up to these standards? Because a lot of times I don't, and what we see for the perfectionist, a lot of times they're pretty anxious. They have a lot of performance anxiety because, well, not not rocket science. They're creating these unreasonable standards, standards that they don't control necessarily them achieving them or not. And then oftentimes you see perfectionists, they, they struggle with depression because you think about it, you're battering yourself confidence every day and you're worried about what everybody else is thinking about you and you think they have the same view of you as you do or worse. That's tough, man. That's a constant sort of battering of yourself. You have to find a way to become more accepting of yourself, more self-compassionate and really I think boost yourself up more. Treat yourself well. Remember your strengths. Remember that when you miss out on something where you didn't make it, that's just part of the journey. That's not the end point. You know? You don't need a judge that right now, one of my favorite people, a coach Orlando, he's a men's tennis coach at Michigan state who I worked with, like, guys, we don't need to judge ourselves right now. Let's judge ourselves in three weeks, four weeks. Let's just delay that. There's no need to do that right now because we're a work in progress. Let's just let that happen for awhile. Let's keep working and stay with it. So trying to quiet that judge, but for the perfectionist, the judge is ultra loud and constantly at work.

[20:03](#)

J: And there's some pretty strong data out there. Research that links perfectionists to mental health and physical health and wellbeing. Like could you explain some of that to me?

[20:13](#)

L: No. Again, I think it's just what we're, we're talking about with this perfectionism. When you're creating these unreasonably high standards, right, that you know in your heart that are not achievable all the time. You are, again, you're battering your self confidence, you're putting yourself down, you're constantly judging yourself. You're not present. You're not enjoying being present with your performance that has some negative effects, right? Not just the stress and the anxiety that you feel, which can get very intense, but also when, again, when you're talking to yourself this way all the time and or you're perceiving other people see you this way as a failure. Failure is a very common word for a perfectionist. That again, can lead to some of these more concerning mental health issues were never good enough. You know, and this, this is more like, I don't want to put a downer on this podcast, but there was a kid who committed suicide at my old high school and I was long gone when this happened. But having heard his story, he was a good athlete. And one of the things that he put in his note to his parents before he killed himself was, I just didn't feel I could ever be good enough. That's devastating, right? So that constant feeling of not being good enough in your own eyes, in someone else's

eyes is absolutely devastating for people. And so we have to find a way to be more self-compassionate, more accepting of our, our mistakes, but also our, just our, our human nature. Like we weren't meant to be perfect. We're not perfect beings, you know, nobody is. So, uh, if we can come to terms with that and understand we're gonna screw up. And that's actually part of the good of it, you know, because as someone who, I like to quote all the time, the Mick, said, you know, if it was always perfect, what do you have to look forward to? Right, Mick? I screwed that up, but Mick's getting his...

[21:50](#)

M: If every day was a perfect day, there'd be nothing to look forward to.

[21:53](#)

L: There. See, from the mouth of the most wise man.

[21:57](#)

J: Well you just started touching on maybe ways to try and stay away from becoming a perfectionist. Right? So having that self compassion is one of them as maybe something like culturally society and the the what going down, what are some things that we can either look to avoid or to curb, to limit time on to, you know, to other strategies that we can use so that we, if we are, if we feel like we're perfectionists, how can we start to tackle that? And then if we're not perfectionists, how can we make sure that we are continuing along the the road we're going without letting that perfectionist mindset creep in?

[22:34](#)

L: I think you gotta take a look at yourself, talk and be aware of the words that you're using. You know, perfectionist use the words of should, have to, must, need to, never, always, a lot. These very strong words that lay down judgment or suggests permanency when there's not. So I think trying to limit these kinds of words and saying more like want to, I get to, I will, I am, you know, these kinds of things. You know, again, I love to listen to Rafa because if something is not going right or maybe it's going, you know, fine for him, but he'll say, you know, in the moment. It's a tremendous statement. Right? And I love this with my kids. So, okay, in the moment you weren't feeling the ball well or you weren't, but you can turn that around. Right? So making these things not permanent, but actually just part of the process is very important. So, you know, I would suggest, you know, looking at the language and then I would say think of it more as being accepting of yourself and your humanness that you will make mistakes and that's part of the journey that's gonna make you better. And then being committed to a process of learning and getting better. Acceptance and commitment I think is very key in this.

[23:38](#)

J: That's awesome. What... Do you foresee the role of social media, like things like Instagram, you know, we're so excited to get a like on a picture or that instant gratification part, which I know we've talked a lot about, but can you foresee that social media really accelerating more perfectionist in, in our children on society?

[23:57](#)

L: I think so because again, you know, social media, there's a lot of judgment being laid down, out there, being thrown down and as soon as someone does something that's not considered appropriate or normal or just right, people get

blasted. It's a very rough sort of sphere in this world because people can hide behind their computers and their phones and their tablets and there's no repercussions. There's no responsibility for what they have to say. Right. No accountability. So I think limiting the social media, you know, I know the young people love that, but it just limits a lot of the negativity, the chatter that can come in and you can start to focus more on a process. I mean there's a, if you want to focus on outcome, just go, go look at some of these websites or social media sites and just all the talk about how people look or how they're playing. They're not winning enough. They're a loser. That stuff shifts you into this outcome mindset and can really fuel the perfectionist to be hard on themselves. I would say if you're perfectionist, limit your social media, really just communicate more with people that you trust and you know, have your back and, and are good to you or compassionate as you want to be to yourself and others. And it allows you to focus more on a process. And then when you're going into situations, instead of expecting it to be perfect, anticipate the messy and be good with it. Like, I'm gonna make some mistakes today. I know that's coming. Okay? Like everybody does that. It's normal, but I want to be committed to my game every single point I'm going to battle, I'm going to compete. I think if you anticipate it, you know, I think the adults listening to this can all relate to that. If you're going in to do a workout here, like this has to be the most amazing workout, I gotta, I feel great. You're never going to be happy probably. Versus like, okay I just want to get it started. I want to push myself, get a sweat. It probably feel a lot better about your workouts. So it's always a way we're looking at things and the more we can avoid these unreasonable expectations, things have to be just a way they're supposed to be the way they should be. Life isn't that way. Life happens and then you deal with it. And again, I think the more that you are comfortable with that, I think that makes you more resilient and honestly buffers you from mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

[26:00](#)

J: I love how you say, anticipate it, cause it's almost like you're building it into the overall game plan.

[26:05](#)

L: Absolutely.

[26:05](#)

J: You know, I don't think we have a think about that. When we're thinking of a game plan, we're always thinking about the way we want things to go, but we don't anticipate what plan B, what plan C, what plan D is, which you might have to go through in a match. You know, plan A's not working, plan A is my game, that's the way that I want to play. But that's not working cause my opponent is playing a better game right now. So do I have a plan B and anticipate the fact that my best game being put forth the way I like to play, my perfect way is not working. So have I built it and have I anticipated that and I've, I built that into the game plan, I think Wozniacki talked about that when she won her slam, having that plan B. And I think coaches talk about this differently. You know that you need to stay with your game versus being able to adapt. And I think everybody talks about that a little bit differently, but being able to prepare for adversity and not be afraid of it, but actually embrace it. Because you know,

tennis is messy and it's coming. Adversity is around every corner. You know, we just don't know what it's going to look like, what it is. But it's going to be there and if you're okay with that and you have plans for it, I think you're better prepared to go into a match or any performance situation and perform well. More practically, for those listening, one of the things I like to do is have the players plan for certain adversities that might come up, delays in the start of the time, which is normal, right? Rain, wind, your opponent, starting fast and hot, playing great, your first serve not being on. You plan for these things and you talk about, well, what is your response going to be? And there's a mental response and there's a tennis response as well, some decision making about how to play and then you, you visualize it and do what I call these adversity visualizations. You do them during the week so that when you get to match day, then you can visualize, you know, playing well and competing and all the positives. But you've done all your planning, you know exactly what to do. Michael Phelps, the swimmer who's won all those gold medals. He will visualize a perfect race and then visualize when adversity can happen and how he's going to respond to it, which helped him win the gold in 2008 when his goggles broke and he couldn't see, so he counted his strokes so he knew where he was. Amazing effort. Still win it. He can visualize the perfect race because he doesn't have someone in his lane trying to push him and move them out of the way. Right? He doesn't have someone blocking him from his goal. He can go in his lane, he can swim his speed, whatever he wants to do. Right? In tennis, you don't have that opportunity. The other person on the other side is going to do something to mess you up. So the more that you become aware of that and accepting of that, that they can play well and stuff can happen. That doesn't go my way and that's fine and I'm good with that. All I need to do, all I need to do is compete every point, play my game and find a way at the end, because if you, the last time I heard, if you win the last point, you win the match. That's what I've been told.

[28:47](#)

J: Really?

[28:48](#)

L: That's what I've been told you've been.

[28:49](#)

J: You've been learning.

[28:50](#)

L: Oh, even even against you. Like if I win the last point, I win. Now it might be after the first point we play.

[28:56](#)

J: Ain't gonna happen.

[28:56](#)

L: There's a challenge being laid down.

[29:00](#)

J: So we're running a little short on time here, Larry. And we're going to do this a little bit differently cause I feel like we've covered a lot of areas for the players, for coaches and for parents. We usually like to give top tips before we close up. Your one top tip for a player to manage perfectionism. Your one top tip to help

a coach that are dealing with players that may show perfectionism and also for the parent.

[29:22](#)

L: Oh, put me on the spot, JP.

[29:24](#)

J: You know, you got to see how you deal with pressure.

[29:27](#)

L: Pressure yeah. Okay.

[29:29](#)

J: But it doesn't have to be perfect.

[29:29](#)

L: Breeze. It doesn't have to be perfect. Good because it's not going to be, so I think for the players, okay. If you can set some process goals, how to goals, how you want to play, how you want to compete and visualize that going in and make that how you evaluate your performance. It gets a lot easier to deal with some of these perfectionistic tendencies. And I also think accepting the messiness of tennis and that you will make mistakes along the way and it's fine. It's just one point, you can recover from that. All right. Coaches remove. Perfect from your, your lingo. Talk about learning through making mistakes and failing, learning from losses and the process and the journey of getting better because you don't want winning and losing getting in the way of getting better. You don't want mistakes to get in the way of getting better. It should never be the way. Finally for parents is probably something pretty similar. So I'll say be careful of taking your thoughts about success and failure and achieving and just naturally putting them down on your child and be aware if you have some perfectionistic tendencies that you know that everything has to be the way it's supposed to be. It has to be perfect. You know, nothing can be just a little bit off. Manage your own responses, manage the way you talk about these things with your child and realize that if you have an athlete, especially a tennis player, you're not doing them good if you're talking about perfect. Talk about bouncing back from mistakes and talk about the, the battle of finding a way and, and, and the joy of competing and playing someone who challenges you and you know, either way, whether you win or lose, what you gain from that. So I think changing the way we talk about these things and making it less about having to demonstrate an unreasonably high level of performance all the time and make it more about the messiness. This is what Nadal gets. Like, he gets it, he likes the, the battle. He, he doesn't care that people think his forehand's not as pretty as Federer's. He'd rather just be you.

[31:21](#)

J: Awesome. Awesome. Larry. Those are some great tips and I think we covered a lot of really great areas. I think it's a really pertinent topic that, you know, can be, can be rife in the tennis world and so that, that finishes up for today.

[31:32](#)

L: Well, thanks JP.

[31:33](#)

J: Thanks for all the insights. For more information, visit playerdevelopment.usta.com for more resources about mental skills training.

Uh, we have a lot of resources on the website. We're also going to post an article up on the show notes, um, about perfectionism. The title is... Let's have a look. How perfectionism can make you sick and how to stop it by Dr. Holly Phillips. So check that out. Uh, and until next time, Dr. Larry and I are checking out.