J: Welcome to the compete like a champion podcast where we explore the psychology of performance, advanced coaching and sport science through the lens of professional tennis. You're here with Dr. Larry Lauer, mental skills specialist, and coach Johnny Parkes with the USTA player development. This week we're going to talk about purposeful practice and I'm going to start you off with a little bit of a story before I segue over, but we want to take you through a journey today of what is purposeful practice, why practice with purpose and how do you practice with purpose. So we're going to go back to my story. Let's go to one of the greatest players that have ever played basketball, Kobe Bryant. I'm going to give you a, an excerpt from George Mumford's book mindful athlete. In it he says, when I worked with Kobe Bryant, he was making about 1,303 points in a day in the off season. Every high performing athlete knows that if you want to achieve something, then you have to be willing to pay the price. You also have to be willing to get up early in the morning and do the same thing thousands and thousands of times and then another thousand times with purpose, which leads me to purposeful practice. So Dr. Larry Lauer, what is purposeful practice?

L: Well, I think it's exactly what you're saying. It's, it's knowing why you're doing what you're doing. It's having a purpose for being out there. I think we see so many athletes going through the motions and not really knowing their purpose when they're out there, that they waste time, they lose time. And that's important developmental time that they can never get back. This purposeful practice is knowing exactly why you're doing what you're doing. It's, it's engagement nonstop. It's engagement. Uh, every moment that you're out there, you know, Jose Higueras talks about engagement with all of your senses where physically you're engaged, emotionally, you're engaged. Every part of you is into, into what you're doing and to getting better. Yeah.

J: And it seems like, I mean, this is tough for the juniors, you know, juniors growing up. I mean, this is something that definitely has to be trained. It has to be understood. One thing that when I think of purposeful practice, a lot of books that I've read have been centered around this, this kind of premise of 10,000 hours to master a skill. And, and now this, you know, there's been plenty of books out there trying to either prove or disprove this 10,000 hours. I mean, why this number? Why is it 10,000 hours? And I think a lot of the materials coming out now in the literature States, well it's not necessarily 10,000 hours, but how much of those hours that you put into developing your craft is actually based on purposeful practice that playing with a meaning, you know? So if we look at tennis, how much of the practice is spent actually deliberately.

L: Right? Well, and I think that you, if you go back to that research, and I've read the original research article, that's just a mean for across the number of people, how much time it took for them to become an expert. And, and it became something different in the media where, okay, there's this golden 10,000 hours which isn't true. I think it depends on the sport. I think it depends on the person.
J: Oh, how'd you even measure that?

L: Oh, I mean it really in some ways is subjective, but I think the key is, is what you're pointing out Johnny. That is the quality at which you practice, right? If you practice with a high level of quality of the engagement, uh, with a purpose being there every moment. In tennis we talk about having a purpose for every shot that you hit every ball and not taking shots off or drills off, then you can achieve essentially with good coaching, we can't throw that out either, but it should be able to get close to your potential. But yeah, this 10,000 hours, you know, with Malcolm Gladwell and I think it just got taken in the media and taken for a spin.

J: It blew up. Blew up everywhere. This is now what we need to do is 10,000 hours over 10 years.

L: And I think that's dangerous, don't you? Because now you have parents who say, well, all right, let's get our 10,000 hours in by the time I'm 13.

J: Yeah. No, absolutely. And I think in all honesty, I'd say it's a part of the reason, I mean only a part, part of the reason why tennis keeps going down this early specialization route. Oh, we've got to get a heads up, you know, in 10 years time, if I want to be a professional when I'm 17, I've got to start at seven years old just playing tennis, 4 hours a day, 365 days a year, over 10 years. And that's how I'm gonna get to my 10,000 hours. And I think some of that is, is I think it's a misrepresentation on how you get to that skill level.

L: Well, I mean, if you go back to it it's a deliberate practice, but it's also the time and competition and learning from that competition, uh, which is going to fuel your practices. You're gonna learn from the competition and bring that back to your practices. So the practices don't live in a silo that aren't influenced by the matches and it's this balance that you're trying to find as a coach or as a parent where you got to practice so much, but you also need to play and you need to, you need to showcase those skills and put them under pressure is really the big thing. And do they hold up? And if they do, then you can then go onto the next step. And if they don't, then you had to go back and work at it again. But no, I think if you're talking about this idea of purposeful practice, it's you have to prepare to be purposeful, right? You can't just show up at the courts like, Oh, okay, I have a purpose. I'm here. There's this deeper why and an understanding of what you're working towards that's going on in the player. And those that have it are spending time before they ever step on the courts. Preparing themselves. Yes, physically, but also mentally. And that can be as simple as a process goal of, okay, I want to work on my footwork work today. Here's what I... In my mind I have a vision of what that looks like based on how I'm being coached. And that also is driven onto the surface by outcome goals. I have this dream of being a professional player or uh, I want to play at the hardcore nationals later this year and do well, you know, so this practice really means a lot to me, but I think the players whom take the time to really work these things out in their mind and, and, and connect with their purpose, I think
they're the ones, you know, ones that are preparing that come out and are ready to go on the first ball.

06:08

J: Yeah, I mean, absolutely don't get me wrong. I mean, what we're saying here is, is okay, purposeful practice, deliberate practice, but for a kid, for a, for a seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12 year old coming through, part of deliberate practice might be just free play, right? The ability to explore creativity and explore how they're going to get from A to B. And as they get through to those professional ranks, then yeah, they're playing at a skill level, a high level. That purposeful practice needs to be a habit that is set in daily. But as you just brushed on there, it ultimately comes back to that why. Right? That why and think it'd be great to have this discussion now and, and, and dive a little bit deeper into that why.

06:44

L: Can I just point out one thing? What you were just saying Johnny is that, you know, John Cote, a sports psychologist from Canada has talked about purposeful play and this idea of deliberate play, excuse me. And this idea of that free time but working on things, right? Yeah. But had done in a fun way, in a playful way. So I again, don't let, we don't want to give the message to parents or coaches out there that this needs to be a mundane process. You know, cause I, I see parents say, okay, my kids are going to spend an hour in front of the mirror, shadow stroking their strokes and the kids just hating it, just hating it and doesn't want to do it. And then you'll see the motivation on the practice court. Uh, I think we missed the concept of deliberate play, which we used to have when we're younger. We're going out and play and figure it out, you know, and that's missing. But um.

07:36

J: That's part of the why. You've got to have fun. You got to enjoy. If you're going to play at a high level, you're going to play the top levels of the game. You've got to enjoy it.

07:45

L: That's probably the only way Kobe would take the time to, to shoot those 1,303 pointers is because he enjoys it. And I think there's a part of this is that the enjoyment of the actual movement and the doing, but also the delayed gratification of, I know that in doing this that when I'm playing in the playoffs later this year and the pressures on, someone's hands in my face, I can still knock down this shot because I've shot it so many times.

08:11

J: Yeah, no, absolutely. And he's obviously practiced and explored his skillset to be able to get to that level now where he's isolating a skill, honing in on that skill so that he can execute under the pressure.

08:22

L: Yeah. Right. And just to transition into your why question, is because this idea Erickson talked about deliberate practice that these experts went through. It's not inherently enjoying for all performers. It's actually the repetition, the rote repetition of developing your skills. And that can be actually quite mundane. So you're going to have to have a delayed gratification, which I think gets at your, at your why question.
J: Yeah, no, absolutely. And I, I'm a firm believer as well that we have to have a real deep connection to that why before you even look to the how, because I think often out there it's called, Hey, you got to practice with purpose. You've got to play, come on, we gotta, we gotta make sure that every single shot we hit is hit with a purpose. You know, and I don't think sometimes the player completely buys into it because they don't know how that, how to execute that as a habit. Every single minute of their, their scheduled practices, whether it's on the court, off the court strength and conditioning, warm up, you know, whatever it may be. And I think before you even get to that how, we have to explore that why, and this is something that every player needs to explore is that deep connection to the why and an amazing book that I'm currently reading and I'm, you know, I'm not trying to, you know, I don't get any commission for promoting it.

L: Come on Johnny, tell us the truth. You get kick backs from New Zealand. They don't give the English anything.

J: Maybe if the book was from the English rugby team, that'd be great. But legacy is based around, legacy is based around the New Zealand all blacks, which are now one of the most highly performed successful teams that are operating at something like an 85% win percentage. I mean, they're amazing. And the author of that book, James Kerr, went and spent a significant period of time in their camp to understand their culture, understand their philosophy and one of the quotes in that book is "The person with a narrow vision sees a narrow horizon. The person with a wide vision sees a wide horizon." Right? So to me that speaks a big picture. How do you look to the big picture?

L: Yeah. And I had the fortune to spend some time with the all blacks, um, at a retreat that we were doing in California with Ken Ravizza? Yeah. Dr Ken Ravizza invited them in and it was that...

J: Did you learn the [inaudible] dance? Did you learn the Hakka?

L: I did learn the Hakka. Um, I wouldn't say that...

J: You haven't shown us that yet.

L: No, I, I, I don't wanna, I really don't want to make it look bad.

J: I promise I won't record it if you show me after this episode is done.

L: I can't even do it anymore. But I respect them too much to just ruin their haka. But, uh, especially since I have very little rhythm. But what I was going to say is that the, then the all blacks, that we're talking about, they have this greater why that relates to community, to these values that, that what it means to, to be, you know, an all black and also from their community in New Zealand. So it's not just a matter of, uh, and I think this is sometimes in tennis work, it's
difficult. My why is such an individual why, whereas the all blacks, it's a, it's a collective why and it's not just even within the team, but nationally and, and just the pride that everyone has in the All Blacks and relating back to the haka and in some of the, the, the values that live within that culture. But in tennis a lot of times that, that why is pretty individualistic and that's why we try to rally players around this idea of, of playing for your country, playing for the US playing for USTA and having a greater why. Because those why's tend to to stick around when things aren't going well. But if my why is just about me and it's about an outcome that I want to win this tournament, a lot of times it's easy to give in or you know, the, in that practice where no one's watching to maybe cut some corners. But if I know that I don't want to let down my country and my teammates, that's a different level of accountability. So, uh, this, this idea of why I think it helps a lot when it's a collective why. When it's related back to values that you believe in? You know, we talked to our players about their why and you know, I think sometimes we think it's a, it's a singular thing that I want to be a professional tennis player, but it can be multiple things. It can be representing my country. It can be being a pro player, winning slams, whatever that may be you have in mind. But the fuel comes from this dream that you have. You know, Djokovich talked about visualizing, uh, holding up the Wimbledon trophy, right, and being number one in the world and winning slams, but also from the daily why and connecting with your purpose. And I always like to think of it as climbing a mountain, that if the dream is to get to the top of the mountain, you're not going to just bolt up there and jump to the top of the mountain. You had to take one step at a time and it's the same way with...

13:15

J: Sometimes that means I have to come down [inaudible] before going back up again.

13:19

L: Yeah. The idea is switch backs, right. And then just going backwards to go forwards or plateauing. Anybody who's ever hiked a mountain, knows that there are stretches where you don't feel like you're going anywhere, but you have to go through that to get to the next steps where you can go up. Yeah, and I think in doing so you have to have that dream, but you also need to be connected with the plan and the daily why. That process of, and that has to have value to right. Being the best I can be.

13:47

J: Well I, again, I mean why would you want to climb that mountain. If you're a tennis player, why would you want to sacrifice to become a grand slam champion? Right. I mean, go back to the Kobe example. Why would you want to pay the price? You know, why'd you sacrifice and pay the price to get to the top of that mountain?

14:04

L: Especially when you don't know if you're ever going to reach it. Right. Especially in sport, you know, everybody, Oh well not everybody, a lot of people have this dream of playing professional tennis, win a grand slam, being number one in the world. But very few actually make it. What I think the value is and what someone like a Kobe or the all blacks would tell you. A lot of the benefit is
in the journey and the striving for. I remember a story with Brett Farve, uh, talking about finally winning the Lombardi trophy, the Superbowl and saying, you know, that when he held the trophy, it was a little bit of a let down because he had... All the work he had done, you thought it would be this exhilarating moment that could not be matched. But he actually said, you know, it was a little bit of a let down cause it didn't feel the way maybe I dreamed it would be. He said the real fulfillment came from the journey, the time in the locker room with the guys, the practices in the heat in August. Uh, the tough games to get to that point. And I think sometimes we just want to get to the top of the mountain. But I think when you look back, anybody who's climbed a mountain would say, man, the journey sometimes is what you value even more. You like the vision from the top. But the journey is where you really, I think your character and, and just a real fulfillment to actually get to the top of the mountain is what you take a lot from.

15:18 J: Well that's why you see a lot of athletes, they break down when they reach that top of the mountain, they break down the, the emotions overwhelm them. And you've gotta be thinking about the pain, the sacrifice, the joy, the, everything that went into get into that moment. They're just unleashing their emotions. And we see that obviously a lot in tennis when people win their first grand slam, you see it at the world cup. I mean we just watched the world cup that's just gone by, you know, Panama are playing in their first world cup ever. And it was, it was amazing. It took a clip of the common Panama commentators that were commentating on the, on the game against England. Obviously I watched that game, 6-1 England by the way.

15:59 L: They gave up a goal?

16:00 J: You know, but these guys, these commentators, when that national Anthem played, they broke down in tears. When they scored that first goal, the players at 5-0 down, to go 5-1, the players celebrated like they just scored in the last minute of the game. And you're thinking, hold on a minute, these guys, why, I mean they get in their ass you know, beat and they're celebrating like they've won the game. Well, you go back and think, well, this is Panama's first world cup and that's their first world cup goal. And the emotions overcame a lot of them because the, the sacrifice and the success and the pain and everything that went into getting to the world cup, it must've been huge for them. And this is something that they all share this commonality of this deeper sense of purpose because they're playing for each other and they're playing for their whole nation. I mean, these guys weren't just happy to be there. They gave everything, they tried everything and they gave everything and they just were overcame with their emotions afterwards. And you know, you've gotta be, I look at that and go, well, where are these emotions coming from? And you hear stories about how the team got there in the first place and all these players are playing for each other and they're playing for their whole country. And that to me means that these guys are out there for, with playing with purpose. And now the skill level may not be up to England's, you know, if not many are.
L: We'll see as the tournament goes on. Well, no, I think that's why you often see too that after these kind of pinnacle events, these culminating events that sometimes athletes actually feel very sad and depressed because of the level of emotion and, and the, and just to push to get to that point. But I think if we bring the focus back to purposeful practice, uh, and, and this why you can, you could see why the Panamanian team would practice and get better, right? Because if this strong national connection and this, this desire to, to play their first world cup, um, if we, if we talk about tennis, where, where does that emanate from? And again, I think that, you know, if you take more of a tennis story with Andre Agassi, you know, the book Open and he talks a lot about his socialization in the sport with his father and then going to work with Nick Boletierri, and, and really sort of being drug all along and, and feeling like he had to do it. And, and it wasn't something that he enjoyed. And he talked about the monster, right, shooting balls at him. When he found a greater why, a greater purpose. And that was for others, changed the whole game for him. And he became, what you would say would be the model professional at that point of his career, where early in his career people say he wasn't. He was flashy and sometimes wouldn't fully commit in certain matches, but he became the model of consistency, of discipline, of work ethic, uh, you know, working with Gil Reyes and then with Brad Gilbert and Darren Cahill. You saw this development in him. But that doesn't happen without that why, does it? Without that why that I'm doing this for others, for those kids that look up to me, those people who I can help through my tennis, through his charities, through his charter schools.

J: Who he can inspire.

L: Yeah. It's the inspiration he talked about in his final match. The speech that he gave at the US Open after losing two Becker, not Boris, Benjamin and saying, look, I've really, I'm going to paraphrase, I'm going to get this wrong. Sorry Andre, but kind of standing on your shoulders and you've lifted me up and decided that why came from the desire to inspire others. And I think that that pushes you through those hard workouts and this level of deliberate practice that needs to happen. Now let's not be confused. Most 14 year old kids aren't thinking about charter schools and, and, and helping others. Some help in their own ways, little ways. But again, it's this idea of if you're a coach or a parent, make sure the why is your kid's why and help them explore that. Why do you want to play tennis? Why do you want to get up on, on a Monday morning, it's seven, right Mick, and go in and what are we doing this for? Don't do it for me cause I'm going to be okay either way. What is your why?

J: Yeah, that's, that's a great point. And I'm, I'm going to flip, I'm gonna role reverse right now with you, Larry here. As we look at that why? Because I think this is something that I think to all the players that I've worked with and all the families that I've tried to help with with, with their child's tennis. And we're gonna flip roles cause I'm going to get back to my, my degree days of my very basic understanding of psychology. Okay. And obviously you'll know a lot more about this than I will, but Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
L: Mick, be ready to edit this please.

J: Hopefully it's not invalid information. Let's, let's see how this goes. Okay. So on my understanding, right of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and, and a lot of you out there may have heard of heard of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It's basically understanding the principle that once beyond the satisfaction security of your basic human needs, which is safety, food, water, shelter, warmth, comfort, you're basically no longer driven by purely extrinsic motivations because you have all the things you need to survive, right? You need everything that you have in life in order to get by and survive. And so I, you see this a lot in tennis players because obviously a lot of tennis players that come through, a lot of them have these needs, right? They already have these. So whether they make it, you know, pro or not, they've got college advancements they can go through and then you know, connections and, and you see that a lot. So, so when it pertains to tennis players really have to dive into that intrinsic motivation. What gets them up to that why, you know, like for you, why do you get up every morning to do your job? Why do I get up every morning to do my job?

L: Yeah, that's a great question. And for me, Johnny is sports psychology professional and getting to work with some of the best tennis players in the country every day and our pros and our transitional pros. I feel a sense of gratitude to have that opportunity. And also a sense of responsibility for leading our mental training and the curriculum that we're putting in place and the works that we do with each one of the players and with the coaches. So I think it's a little more complex than sometimes we make it out to be that it's just I want to be the best, which I think I have that notion as well. Even though there's no way for me to ever measure that as a sports psychology professional, but this understanding that it's more complex than that the gratitude that you feel for, for the opportunity you have and really reconnecting with that every day. It was like, I get to do this podcast with you. You know, that actually people would, might want to listen to this podcast. You know, it makes me feel appreciative of, of everything and the people who have gone into helping me to, to get to this point and remembering that, uh, the professors, my, my mentor, uh, dr Dan Gould and, and many other folks, but I think this why has got to be something that you're reconnecting with on a daily basis and you're formulating based on where you're at. Yes, I have his dream of being professional tennis players. So what's the next step? Why am I going to go to this training camp at the national campus, you know, for this next week, how is that gonna help me take steps up the mountain? I think you need to connect with that purposefully and spend time thinking about it and, and again it goes back to you know, waking up in the morning and knowing what your, why you're getting up, what, what is that leading to? What does success look like? So if you're getting up in the morning and you're writing, writing down your goals, you're writing down how you're going to achieve them, you're visualizing your mind then. And then at the end of the day coming back and saying, how did I do? And holding yourself accountable, but also being appreciative of the steps that you made and feeling that success and that confidence from those small steps that come. That is the problem I think with juniors 13, 14 they're going through this very heavy,
deliberate practice stage that again, if you quote Ericsson is not necessarily inherently enjoyable in the moment, but if you know what you're doing it for, and you can see the small steps in the progression and you know how it's leading you up the mountain, then you can stay motivated. But if it's all outcome-based, if you're unintentional, if you're living unintentional so you're not connecting with your why when you wake up in the morning, and taking five minutes to do some kind of meditation or mindfulness and being aware of where you're at mentally and emotionally, and then bring in your mind, your purpose, visualizing it and seeing your success. This is a great morning routine that Mark Divine, a Navy seal talks about. If you're not doing that, you can be living unintentionally. And to me, I'll go back to what I said earlier, those who are most purposeful in their practice or engaged are the ones who prepare to be that way. So when you're talking to them on the court about the drill, they're being very aware of the purpose of that drill. And they're also paying attention to how they're going to be successful in that drill and they're processing this information. And if they're not getting it, they'll ask again, what do you mean, how do I do this? As a very clear mental exercise, it has to go on focusing and it takes effort. So it's not just the effort of the actual practice but the focus and the connection with the purpose and, and being prepared to do that. So you don't come into the gym five minutes before your practice, pull on the TheraBands for a few moments and then walk out onto court. Probably not going to have a purposeful practice.

25:31

J: And I think that goes, you know, you touched on, well, many different things there, but ultimately the player, they need to know why, right? To get full buy-in, to do, to do that exercise or that skill on court. They need to understand the why. And from the coaches perspective, they need to have the skill to help their player understand that why. Now that might be different, they might have a different approach with each player because they're different personalities, different people, different way that they learn. But that coach needs to work on that skill that helps each individual player understand the why. And I don't think it's good enough anymore to say because I'm the coach and that's, you're doing it because that's what I said. Right? We're moving into this, you know, generation Z and you know, one of your mentors, Dr. Dan Gould presented out to us on this generation Z. And if you're not good at creating this, helping create this why for the player on court, I don't think you've got a shot of helping the player maximize their ability. I just don't think it's possible.

26:27

Well, it's, we talk about, you know, in terms of education now you're, you're doing this to them versus doing it with them. And I think as a coach, whether you're, you're in a team sport or you're in an individual sport like tennis, one of your first things you need to know why people are there. Why are you here? Why would you choose to show up on my court and come here in this 95 degree heat and actually hit tennis balls? You can be doing a lot of things. They can be sitting at the beach, sitting at the pool, going to Disney, whatever. We're here in Orlando.

26:58

J: Oh, I'm not going to Disney again.
L: Let's not go down that road. So there's so many competing motives so that if a young person would choose to show up and give their effort, we really need to know why. And knowing that is true power because then the coach can understand and help to, uh, not only help to fulfill their why, but also fill in the areas where they're needed. Cause again, if their why is they show up and they want to be number one in the world, that's great. Have that dream. But you also got to think about being professional and doing things the right way and what this means for how you feel about yourself as a person. And that can be extremely motivating. I think it's diversifying that why and helping players connect with their values and what they truly believe about themselves and how they're representing their family and their country. Um, this brings depth to the why. And so coaches need to have that conversation with their players. Now if you're in groups and you have 12 kids on three courts, can be pretty challenging. Right? But, uh, you know, I think the more time you spend with a player, you have to know why they're there.

J: Yeah. And again, we've brushed up on this on another episode, but relationships and building those relationships in order to, for that player to buy into the why's. And again, it's a coaching skill, but let's segue onto the how. Okay. And then, I'm going to tee you up here with, uh, a quote from a German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Okay. He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how. Okay. So when I listen to this, when I try and understand it, it basically comes back to that reason to sacrifice and in order to, if you have a good why, it doesn't matter what the how is, you're going to do whatever is necessary to fulfill that why, that deeper purpose, that shared purpose. So I think as we come to the how and you just touched up on it, like why do I get out of bed every morning? You just mentioned earlier, I think it starts with goal setting. I think ultimately you need a dream. Yes, your dream and what connects you to that dream is part of that why. But how do I go about it? And I think it starts with goal setting with some actual small measurable achievable goals that a player can lay up. I mean I know when I played in college, I played, you know, when I played for the university of New Mexico. Shout out to the Lobos. I had a goal sheet right next to my bed and nobody told me to do that. I just thought, you know, if I'm going to be really successful my last couple of years, which is what, I really wanted to be the best teammate that I could. I sat down and really spend some time thinking about my why and then I'd put my why down and then I'd also go, well, how am I going to go about achieving this? And I broke it down to many different areas, but we can look at the hows within our preparation, which we've already brushed up on how during the warm up around court, which we talked about a little bit, strength and conditioning with mental skills. Okay. Your nutrition, your hydration, is it prehab rehab or personal discipline or school? Especially for the juniors. Right. And then our family. How are we going to go about using each one of these areas of our day to achieve that why? How are we going to go about it?

L: Yeah. Well I think it would go back to some of the things we've been talking about. Wake up, connect with your purpose, really be aware of where your mind is through mindfulness, uh, just sitting quietly, journaling. I think you'd try
to set up having that purposeful practice, uh, before you ever step on the court. I think I'm, I'm, I'm a big fan of imagery or visualization because if you're spending time reconnecting with your purpose and you can do it in an immersive way where you're visualizing yourself, seeing yourself doing these things on court, and also knowing how that connects with the larger dream where, okay, one day I want to play in Wimbledon and I've got, I gotta be able to do this step. I gotta be able to hit the backhand out of the corner and recover. If I can't do that, it's never going to happen. Right? So it's being able to, and again, this is where the coaches are huge, but really, really taking the time to, to do what you said you did, uh, and complete those goals. Have a plan and then create expectations for how you're going to live towards those goals everyday. How are you going to take those steps? Being on time and drinking water and hydrating and listening to your coaches and asking questions. All these things that make someone engaged in practice begin with being prepared. And then when you look at the practice, for me being around practices for 40 years, one of the things you see, there's a presence about someone who's, who's very purposeful and engaged. Uh, their eyes are in the court. So you keep your eyes on the court. When the coach is talking, I mean, they're all ears and they're engaged and then they're trying what the coach is asking. They're truly giving the old college try rather they're giving it a shot and they're asking questions of the coach and when a coach says something, they don't understand it, then they ask, well, can you give that to me again? I didn't understand. Or one of my favorite things when I hear a player do it, is a coach will be teaching something and maybe they're teaching the drop shot, then the player will be, well, okay, well what about this situation on the clay? Is this a good time to use the drop shot? And then you know, okay, this person is processing. They're very engaged because they're thinking about other ways that they can use this skill. So these, these are all indicators for me that someone's truly engaged in their own development. And those are some practice things, you know, be purposeful about your water break. When you go to get a sip of water, take some time to breathe and bring your heart rate down, slow your breathing, and then reconnect with your purpose. It might be your greater purpose, your dream. And then coming down to, okay, what is my purpose today? Well, it's to get behind every ball, it's to move my feet, whatever it is, right? To get shape on the ball. I'm not the tennis coach here. So do you reconnect with that? Or you could reconnect with the purpose of the drill. You see yourself doing it successfully, then you go out and you and you do it. So one of the other things I will say is, and Kevin [inaudible], who was out in California, a tennis coach and also sports psychology professional, he used to talk about how if you're performing really well, step back, connect with how you're doing it, feel it, and then go back and do it again. If you're not doing it well, step back, take a couple deep breaths, reconnect with how you want to play your purpose, and then go back in with energy. So I mean, I think there's ways that you can practice, create the purposeful practice that you want that are pretty practical that people miss on. Now, why? Because they're emotional because they dwell on the mistakes that they make because they get caught up in the things they can't control. It's too hot. It's windy. I don't like what my coach is saying. So there's, there's a lot of things that would distract them from
their personal practice, but the true professionals know why they’re doing what they’re doing. They have a plan and they stay with it. They stay with it the whole way.

33:52

J: Yeah, I absolutely agree.

33:54

L: Yes. Essentially it's knowing your why and you're creating routines and structure in your warmups and your on-court practices and then your post practice so you're learning in every situation you're getting better. And so these routines that I'm talking about, whether it's in the water break, it's when you miss a couple shots or when you're playing well, when your coach is talking to you, the pros have very specific ways of dealing with these things. They don't just, uh, you go do whatever they want. They're not just spontaneous beings. They know if their coach is talking to them, that they make eye contact, they listen, they know when they're on a practice court and they're, let's say they're at Indian Wells, they're not looking at the mountains or staring at the people eating hamburgers on the sideline. They're engaged with their practice, right? They stay in that bubble. So that's what you see with the folks that, excuse me, the athletes who are purposely practicing.

34:48

J: Yeah, no, absolutely. I, I'm a huge believer in if we don't have that deep, that deep sense of why, the how, how becomes almost not irrelevant completely, but it doesn't really matter what the, how is. If you, if you really don't have that, why, then you're going to have limitations in your level.

35:07

L: You know, even it's almost robotic if you don't have the why, you're just doing what you're told.

35:11

J: You're just doing it because you're doing it. Like this I'm going, you're just going through the motions, you know? And that in itself is, if you have a player that, like at the water breaks, right, that doesn't look particularly engaged. The switching off or what not, I would look at that and go, this, this, this player doesn't, you know, obviously doesn't enjoy it doesn't want to be out here. Maybe they just haven't connected with that why yet. And we just have to figure out how to explore that first. And if we explore that and that and we really can't help the player find that deep sense of why. And that means working with the parents too, and maybe some of the other coaches that are around them. We've got to really explore and help that player find the why.

35:46

L: Don't you think people want to have a why?

35:48

J: Absolutely.

35:49

L: Right? They don't want to sit there disconnected from the practice. They don't want that necessarily.
J: I think one of the most, um, you know, when I think about why I do something, there's one of the things I get frustrated with the most is if I'm doing something and I don't have purpose to it or I don't understand why I'm doing it, I just get frustrated with it. So I have to come back to, well, why am I doing this? I have to, I have to engage myself on an emotional level to understanding that why and then I'm going to problem solve how to go about it. Because I know from, from I've had great coaches, great parents, been fortunate enough to be in a situation where I've been able to nurture what I like to think as creative problem solving. You know? And you have to nurture that skill. But I'm able to do the how any way because I'm willing to sacrifice for my why. And if I don't understand that, why, then ultimately it doesn't really matter how I go about it. It's just gonna be going through the motions.

L: Your full self, and go back to what Jose Higueras talks about, your full self will [inaudible] all your senses. You're not immersed in the experience.

J: Yeah. You have to be fully immersed in it.

L: And to do that you have to have a strong why. And again, I would, I would argue that that can be a diverse why it's not just about being number one in the world. It can be, uh, that I'm representing my family, my country. I want to be the best I can be.

J: You want to be a role model.

L: You want to be a role model. I'm getting ready for my next tournament. I want to do well. So there's many, many why's.

J: Well, one thing Nick Kyrgios takes a lot of flack for is that he goes out and court some times and he tanks a few points. And he does this and people just jump to conclusions and judgments about him. Well, what people don't see is the foundation work he does to helping children when he's, uh, when he's practicing. Uh, I saw him one time, he was in Phoenix practicing at a club there and he's practicing for a little bit, but then he's messing and goofing off with the kids. He's engaged in the kids. He's asking the kids to come on him and mess around with him. And to me that's part of his why, I mean, I don't know him very well, so I won't speak for him, but if he's willing to go out there and do it any, you know, and he, he does all this other type of work in helping kids and maybe he's doing what he's doing for that purpose of inspiring the next generation of kids to be where he's at. I don't know, maybe deep down he doesn't want to be a grand slam champion. He has his own unique way about how he goes about that. But ultimately there's an example of a why, you know, I mean, you brought it up to me earlier. Why does Raffa come back from injury? Pretty significant injuries.

L: Multiple times.
J: Multiple times and want to, Murray's doing it right now. Why does Roger age 37, he's got all the money in the world, he's got a great family. Why does he want to continue to go out there and put his body on the line to keep winning grand slams?

L: Why does Serena have a baby and then come back and Lindsay Davenport did the same thing earlier.

J: Kim Clijsters.

L: Kim Clijsters.

J: Came back after having a kid to win the US open.

L: Why do this? Why you have these, you know, Kvitova goes through that attack and comes back, right? So there's a deeper meaning to the why that I think that these great players have. And I think again, we like to box it up into they want to be the best in the, in the, in the world. You know, they want... But I think it's more complex in that they're, they're a role model. They have these different, different meanings, you know, for Serena I'm sure, and again, without talking to her about it, that she has this deeper meaning being a woman and an African American. And really having this amazing career and how she's inspiring so many young female players and probably males too.

J: Um, I mean you talk about the way, sorry, you listen about how Sloan Stephens talks about Serena now we got young Coco Gauff coming through and they always talk about how Serena and Venus inspired them and still inspire them to be great.

L: Well the, the Williams sisters are leaving a legacy of American champions probably. We'll see how it goes, but they're inspiring, uh, generations of future players. And I think that, uh, what you see is as you mature and you get older, we just talked about the Agassi story. This, this why becomes diversified. It becomes deeper, the meaning becomes greater. Um, and, and so I think what you would want to do over time with your players is really talk about these things. Talk about the examples. And it was interesting because we did a camp in the fall and one of the projects I gave the girls was to pick somebody who's been successful and research how they became successful and why they did it. And the girls came back and had a week to do it and they did these amazing presentations and they, they picked non tennis people and we purposely said, go outside of tennis. And it was awesome and you could just see the, all these stories and why these people were doing these things. And uh, there was a deeper meaning. It was personal, it was emotional and there was a lot of connection there. I don't think when you're, when you're 12, you're necessarily gonna have that. You're doing it cause it's fun because you like the game. It's exciting. But uh, I do think that that grows, that why grows over time. Yeah. And you're going to this deliberate practice. If you want to keep kids in the game,
coaches, you got to keep it fun. You need to be exploring why they're doing it, the dreams they have, but also reconnect. Can't just be about that 10 years from now. It's gotta be about today, about being better, doing things the right way as well. So it can't just be about the top of the mountain, it's gotta be about the next step with the top of the mountain in mind. Um, and helping with that gratification. You know, that delaying that gratification that you're making yourself a better person through striving for this. There's, there's true greatness in this and there's a lot of value to it because whether you become a professional tennis player or not someday you will have become a better person. Yeah. And you talk about late gratification there. I mean that's really a prerequisite to reaching the top of the mountain because I think on the practice court every single day, you don't necessarily see those huge gains. But one thing that you can measure if you're really practicing with purpose is your effort levels, your engagement levels. You can walk on court with a goal to have maximum engagement and maximum focus and effort and you can walk off court and evaluate yourself how you, how you executed those.

42:01

L: And I think it's great when you put younger players with older players who have that professionalism, who practice with a purpose because those older players will be the ones that mentor and model what you're looking for. You might not have to say a word to that player, but afterwards just saying, yeah man, do you see what they were talking about on the court and how they were back and forth and how the person never took a ball off. You know, this is the stuff we hear from our players when they go train with older pros and these experiences. I mean you've got to find a way and it's all relative. If you've got a young junior, having them go practice with the best 14 year old, very professional is the same as one of our young pros going and practicing with with Fed. Obviously not the same, but it's the same concept that I can appreciate that because it's one step up and I see how it can be done successfully. So I think that's a very important part of this whole process as we show our players how to purposely practice. I mean, when I worked for USA hockey's national team development program, we inherently had this because you had the players for two years. So the year one team was learning from year two who had gone through all those struggles and challenges and been coached up. So when they got there the first year, there was a group of guys who had already been there a year and they were mentoring those guys like, Hey, I mean you got to go hard and you're going to make sure you're on time and you know, these workouts in the gym, you gotta be all in man. And these are the conversations that the boys were having. So a lot of the mentoring, the coaches didn't even have to do. A lot of that was being handled between the teams because the boys who had progressed through year one now going into year two knew what those year one guys were going through. So I think if you can set up that kind of peer mentoring, you can help to create this kind of purposeful, purposeful practice that you're looking for.

43:48

J: And that that's a great tip. Go out there and find a mentor that you can learn from and apply yourself. Well, this has been an awesome episode. I'm sure we could sit here and talk for a lot longer, but I think we need to wrap up, hopefully
for the listeners we’ve taken you through understanding what is purposeful practice, why practice with purpose and the how. And as we wrap up here, I’m going to ask you, Dr. Lauer, you can give a couple of key ingredients into practicing with purpose. What would you leave our listeners with as we finish up here?

44:18

L: I think number one is waking up in the morning and reconnecting with your purpose. Whether doing that, journaling through visualization, see your success, see how you’re going to get there live by your values. This will reconnect you with that. As you go through the day, do those short bursts of visualization or reminders with your self-talk, Hey, this is my purpose. This is what I’m doing for every drill and every water break, reconnect. Uh, it’s going to keep you engaged. Those practices, and at the end, really focus back on why you did what you did, but overall, take the time to explore why you’re doing what you’re doing. Why are you getting up in the morning? Why does he, he could be doing a million other things? What do you really love about tennis? What keeps you coming back and keep reconnecting with that cause that will get you through the hard times and the challenges.

45:04

J: And that’s it for today’s episode of compete like a champion. For more information, visit our website playerdevelopment.usta.com and you can email as a teamusa@usta.com. This is Dr. Larry Lauer and coach Johnny Parkes signing off until next time.