Using Music to Prepare for Matches

00:05 J: Welcome to the compete like a champion podcast. You're hearing Dr. Larry Lauer, mental skill specialists and coach Johnny Parkes with USTA player development. Today we're going to dive into music. Using music to prepare for matches.

00:19 L: Yeah, I've been waiting to do this topic for a while cause I love music.

00:23 J: I was kind of surprised when you came to me. It was just not something I've ever, something that we would talk about, but.

00:28 L: Really, yeah, music has been tied to sport for so long, so long. I mean athletes using music to prepare professional musicians, being interested in sports, you know, it coming to watch tennis matches and obviously I, I think there's always been a connection with, you know, professional sport and, and musicians, how they're both entertainers and they both have to produce in front of crowds and Mich's putting up his man Lars Ulrich, the drummer from Metallica who was a very good tennis player by the way. And, and the Bryan brothers.

00:59 M: And his dad Torben. He played Davis cup.

01:01 L: And the Bryan brothers every year at Indian Wells, they play a concert.

01:05 J: John, Johnny Mac.

01:06 L: Johnny Mac plays, you know who's very good, Henrik Lundqvist, who's the goalie for the Rangers. They're very good guitars from one to here. I'd never seen him play. Obviously he's a ranger, not a flyer, but.

01:16 J: I always thought they just will headphones because they were getting their sponsorship dollars and Aon actually this network. Any music? It's just white noise.

01:24 L: No, actually yeah, using music to prepare. So what's Johnny, if you had one song to listen to, you're playing an important match. What would that song be?

01:35 J: I mean, I'm such a Rocky nerd. It has to be a hearts on fire from Rocky.

01:40 L: Sing it right now. I love that song.

01:43 J: Hearts on fire. No, I mean we can put no, we can play it.

01:46 L: We were not allowed to play it. I have to sing it for everyone. Right. Not copyrighted hearts on fire is a good song.
J: It was Eye of the Tiger but then after I watched Rocky 4 and almost ran through a wall cause I was so motivated to just get up and do something, I changed it to Rocky 4 didn't end up being the greatest song to listen to before matches. But we'll go into that later.

L: Oh, okay. So I guess Mich, if you had one song to listen to, who would it be? Not hello kitty please.

M: Maybe T&T.

L: AC/DC.

J: Thunder...

M: That's a different one.

L: That's Thunder struck. That's the other strong.

M: Or a good Rusher Zeppelin tune.

J: Thunder is the one song that has played I think before every single football or American football game around this country.

L: You can count on thunderstruck and welcome to the jungle for sure in any professional game or any high school game really or college. So, yeah, so you know, why this topic, I mean, I, I think about, you know, this intersection of music and sport then, you know, it always comes out in the media a lot and you know, when they're choosing who's gonna play at the Superbowl halftime and should we be going with more pop and, or should it be rock and all this stuff. But, uh, more importantly, athletes use music to prepare further performances. Music has been embedded in preparation for as long as time. Um, and now even during performances, you hear a lot of music as well in the stadiums. So, Oh yeah. You know, so you see athletes kind of rocking out to the music, you know, a little bit in timeouts or whatever. But I think that, like I said, music has been part of sport for the longest time. I remember playing high school sports and having the music on in the locker room before we went out to the field or the court. So I always grew up with music being tied to competition. And inevitably if it was time to prepare, there was music on now might've been in my football and basketball, that kind of background. But at the same time, even when you're, when you're training and you're working out, right, like the Seahawks have a DJ come to training camp. But I mean it, music has always been there when you're in a gym and you're working out. So uh, there is definitely this intersection and I wonder if we use it effectively though.

J: That's a good point. I mean we do, we do see a lot of athletes. I mean you, you know, we'll watch the U S open. We were there, we saw a lot, a lot of athletes, you know, got their headphones on and they're coming out to music or they're
listening to it before, you know, however long before they come out. Just to kind of get dialed in. But I'm interested to know from your perspective, Larry, like what are some of the benefits of it for an athlete to do that? But then what are also some of the downfalls of it?

L: Sure. Well, I think first the benefit is it, it takes your mind off of overanalyzing something that you have trained for and you really don't need to think about much anymore. You want to keep it simple in your mind. So you listen to music, call it like disassociation. So you're not thinking about what's coming, your just kind of listening to music and you know, it, it helps with the nerves. Uh, there's an old story, you know, you go back and you look at, you know, the Spartans for example, going into war, they would sing as they were marching into war. Their enemies thought they did that to intimidate them. They actually did that to deal with their own nerves. They would sing and get that out and it relaxed them. So I think music has a way of letting us relax. You know, if you're singing or if you're just listening, but you're loosening your jaws, you sing, all right. I'm afraid to say this on the podcast, but I'll sing in the car. Especially like if I had to present like, especially early in the morning, like get some good music on, sing a little bit.

J: Prove it.

L: Prove it? Nah, maybe this might not be the time for that. But definitely my kids and my wife have heard me sing lots.

J: Poor them.

L: But uh, you know, I think that, uh, we see it as a way to relax to get into the flow and a rhythm. You know, if you do it during training and has a way of letting players getting to get them a better flow. You know, Brad Gilbert talked about singing a song in your head as a way to sort of don't get caught up in all, your thoughts. No are analyzing and just play right? And just kind of letting yourself, allowing your skills to come out. So I think music has this ability for us to relax, get into flow, get our mind off things, keep it simple. You know, same time, music can be very inspiring, motivating, get us fired up, get us charged up for what's to come. Right. And so we talked about some of the examples, songs you know, that we would listen to, to go into to competition, you know, I think that we use that a lot of times to inspire us to get us excited as well. So that's some, some of the benefits. I see. I'm, I'm, I can talk about the downfalls, but I don't know if you want to respond to that at all.

J: No, absolutely. I mean I love me a good little Nessun Dorma before I get on court to pump me up. You know, it's a.

L: Do you know who that is, Mick?

M: No. When my question was what about during practice playing music during practice? Some pros are for that and some are against it.
L: Yeah, I know. I can see why a lot of pros would be against that because it can be distracting to teaching and I think it depends on what your goal for the practices is. If it's to just get into flow and to be hitting and to play then maybe, but keeping in mind you were always trying to train specific to the environment we're going to compete in so music's not playing while we compete. So you're not going to do that often. But to practice, if it's more about having fun and getting into a rhythm and then maybe you do it, you know as a way to to mix things up or do it as a way to show the the players that you know, when your mind is not so engaged with analyzing every shot and every movement you actually play better and teaching them that and then, okay, now how do we translate that to when it's quiet and then getting into things like, okay, I mean Gilbert's idea of singing a song in your head and he's not the only one said that is just this dissociative technique of distracting yourself from your thoughts. Right? Or things like, okay, so if music really helps, you could use it pre-match but during the match, having specific things that you want to focus on as a way to get yourself ready to play versus letting your mind wander essentially and go to whatever I think is is what we're getting at so...

M: It makes sense.

J: We used to do it, you know, I miss this show, many colleges do, but before the matches we do warmups and then you go with the music going on. Part of it was because fans start coming in and it's somewhat entertaining, but at the same time as well, I think there was some matches. I thought it was helpful because I was a lot more nervous than maybe other matches and actually help kind of level me out a little bit. But then there was some times I just thought it was a little distracting. There are times where I feel like I needed to dial in a bit more and I, I was struggling with focus on that day and I needed to make sure that I could get tuned down in and the music became a little bit more of a distraction. But I think over time, you know, I think it becomes a little easier to shun those things out as you, as you establish your routines with how you prepare so it gets a little bit easier to shut out. So it didn't really become an issue my last couple of years of playing. But saying that some of the downfalls can be that, right, that if either the wrong song selections, like I mentioned at the start, you know, can can pump me up too much or it can mallow you out too much or it could actually then completely take your mind away from what you're trying to prepare it for.

L: Yeah, it's a distraction. Well I think it can be distracting if you're getting into the music and you're forgetting about your purpose. Right. And I think that's what coaches worry about. Plus being able to get the player's attention, have them having being heard. I think if you have a well trained athlete or a team that knows where they're supposed to be, when and what they're supposed to be working on, I think it works better. You know, I, I think maybe I told this story on this podcast, I can't remember for sure, but when I played high school football Friday night, you know, getting ready for the game. I mean it was like for me it was the end all be all. It's everything I look forward to for many years to play in those games. And so, like you, I threw on Rocky and listened to this
soundtrack and by the time I left home and went to the, to the school, I was like, my energy was through the roof. It was like Ray Lewis level. Like I was ready just to go crazy, but I didn't know how to manage all that energy. And so I played really tight and afraid to make mistakes. And so that was a case where the music selection actually didn't help me prepare for, for a game and actually got oversight and tight and then didn't perform as well. And once I learned, I started playing better, I loosened up. Oh. And I remember him playing 40 tennis and, and being, you know, some people will think I'm a little bit crazy about this stuff, but I would prepare and I would stretch and do that stuff. But I would purposely pick music that I felt like wouldn't get me overly excited, but I still felt relaxed and loose. Now for me, like I like rock and roll as you know, so I've, if I throw on, you know, some guns and roses, something like that, van Halen does perfect for me. But for someone else that's not going to be the right thing. They might prefer country music, they might prefer pop, they might prefer, some people listen to classical, but you do need to realize what all these, you know, music is doing. The faster music, the heavier music is creating an intensity, the slower music's kind of relaxing. You write country music kind of calms you down at life is good. You know, some classical make make you feel very relaxed. And so I think there's preference that comes into this and what you like and then there's what the music actually is creating within you. What emotion, what feeling.

J: So for those players that are musically inclined, like using it, what do you feel that they first need to understand before using it?

L: Great question, Johnny. I think you need to understand your optimal performance state. How do you perform when you're at your best? We know that Ray Lewis played middle linebacker for the Ravens was off the charts with his intensity, his energy level, but he had to run around and hit people and yet he had the ability to read or offenses communicate to his teammates and make plays right so he can learn how to manage all that energy. When you're a tennis player, you probably don't want that much intensity because you're doing more fine motor skills. You know where you're hitting shots and you're using your hand and moving your legs and getting into specific positions. You probably don't want to have all of that intensity because you might get overly activated and actually change the way you swing the racket or change how you're feeling the ball. So I think he tried to find an optimal performance state. We relate it to temperature sometimes. What's your temp? How do you feel, you know, zero to a hundred degrees when you're at your best, how are you feeling really fired up, maybe 70, 80 degrees. Are you really cool, calm and collected around 30, 40 a and then they can use other players as models as well. You want to think about really fired up players. Maybe like an adult for example. It'd be in a, in, I dunno how he would consider it, but maybe in the upper ranges. 70, 80 degrees, 90 I don't know. And then who looks cool, calm and collected on the outside like a Federer, right? They have different personalities on the court and you see that coming out. So a player needs to figure out his or her temperature where they play their best. Once you understand, you know, this concept, then you just write your number in what did I feel like my temperature was when I
played going in, especially at the start of the match and then journal that over
time and look at it and say, well geez, my best performances came when I was
so somewhere in the middle or a little bit calmer or a little bit more fired up.

12:20  J: Maybe they should tack the songs that they were listening to at that time.
Right. And that journey. Exactly. And show which songs actually maybe were
more helpful with, with helping them prepare and get the results in, which will
maybe didn't, you know, we, we uh, with one junior player I work with, we had
a song for the tournament each time when we switched it up. And I remember
particularly going to one, the song was hungry like the Wolf, right? Duran Duran,
love that song. Hungry Like the Wolf is a great song. But he would listen to that
before out and he was, you know, it was, get him fired up, get him charged up,
mic turned his mic on. So he's must have something.

12:51  M: I was thinking about baseball. When a batter comes up to the plate, they
usually play their, say like four seconds of their song.

12:56  L: Yeah. Well you know I, I think that'd be great if we did that in tennis. Right.
Cause you that would elicit something. I mean certainly like if I was doing that
now I'd have my favorite or Orlando based band, so I'm sure they won't listen as
podcasts, but alter bridge, that would be what I would play. Bring in that rock
music. They're from Orlando. You need to support them. Okay.

13:16  J: Bon Jovi would be mine.

13:18  L: Bon Jovi. Just heard him yesterday I t
hink. We were coming home from
baseball practice. My son's like, what is that? I'm wanted dead or alive by Bon
Jovi.


13:27  L: Yeah. And again, it elicits something in you. People hear titles of songs and
they get a feeling right. Everybody kinda reacted that knows the song and a, the
elicits an emotion in you and in a feeling. And I think as a player, you want to
figure out what is the music that elicits what you want. And then let's say you
come into that day and being aware, being aware that, okay, I'm a little flatter
today. I'm not that excited. I'm a little tired. My normal might be something
more relaxed, but today I need to play something faster because I got to get
myself going, get myself charged up. Right? So now I'm gonna throw on Mich's
TNT right to get me going. And TNT is dynamite. Mick.

14:07  M: There you go.

14:07  L: I thought you wanted to say something cause you open your mind.

14:09  M: I was thinking about Pavlov the dog, you know with music you ring the bell,
his mouth will water.
L: Well again, you're conditioned to have a certain feeling when you hear certain music, right? Like for me, I grew up with music. My dad played country Western, sorry dad, and not my favorite genre, but, and I listened to music with my cousin all the time and friends. So it was inevitably a part of what I do. So now when I work out or am skating with my son, we throw the music on it just, you know, and it gets you excited and gets you going. But I think if you, you want to get fired up because you're flat, then you need to play faster music. If you want to calm down because you're overly psyched, then you need to slow it down purposely. If you're going to use music. Some people don't like to use music and that's fine. They're not as musically, but if you're using music, use it. Wisely.

J: Getting back to the point of writing down the songs that you, because I think as you said, certain songs, music gets you thinking or gives you memories of things the places you've been and where you've heard it. So if you're putting on a song before a match and you end up losing that match, didn't play great then and then you go and listen to that song again and maybe that brings back those feelings of how you were, how you played in that previous match. Then maybe that doesn't give you the most helpful thoughts going into the next one, so then you might wanna then mix it up a little bit. I did a lot of trial and error with when I listened to music, I got to a point where I didn't want to listen to music before matches because it actually distracted me a bit too much. And I wanted to get, you know, be able to manage my own thoughts and emotions and, and be even keeled going into a match. Music often pumped me up too much. Yeah, but that would be important for most, you know, the athletes out there listening to this is right down those songs that you listened to before matches. The ones that, that you went in and maybe you had a great start to the match in and it helps you prepare. Boom, write those down. That goes on the list of songs that you might want to listen to the songs you listen to that maybe calmed you down a bit too much or maybe got you overly pumped and you came out, had a bad start and then then put those on the list of songs that may not have been too helpful for you. And now you get to kind of do that trial and error. And figure out where that that level is, that even level that helps you prepare on court.

L: That optimal performance state.

J: Yeah. The other thing I think about is music should not be used as again a a distraction to being ready to play. Right? So if, if you are using it to elicit certain things and maybe using it to really get your visualization going. For example, some players will use music to engage visually with what they want to do in a match. And we have our good buddy Dave Ramos here who does a lot of video work and he'll get the players favorite song or song they want and he'll match up highlights with it. And so when you do stuff like that, you start to tag or combine the music with certain visions, which is kind of what you're getting with these memories. Right? But then you're purposely creating sort of a, a feel about you. No way. I want to do things. So if I'm a physical player and I run a lot and I'm a, I'm energized and tense, I might want that faster music. That kind of matches up my, my game style and my personality. And if I'm loose, relaxed, I
might want to pick more of that chill music that connects more with who I am on the court. So again, it's so based on the individual, you know, I have what I like and my ways of doing things, of course as everybody does with music. But I think the key is working it into your preparation in a way that the timing makes sense. You know, are you going to listen to music as you walk in into court? How does that work for you? Are you going to listen to music before you do your warm up? You know, so figuring out what these things are and the timing of it I think is important. And a lot of that is trial and error.

17:43  
J: Hundred percent. So what would be your top three...

17:46  
L: Bands?

17:50  
J: No, you're top three bits of advice to athletes. How to use music in the right way.

17:54  
L: Top three, okay. Summary points here. How to use music the right way. Alright, so I think number one, know you're, excuse me. Know what makes you optimally ready to play your optimal performance state? Am I more of a fired up person? More chill? How do I want to be going into the match? No, that first I think secondly, then make your song choices based on what your needs are to be ready to play the match. Right. And again, musical preference comes in here, but at the same time be wise about it because the examples that you and I gave Johnny, you might be psyching yourself up too much. Uh, so you need to be wise about that. Then I think third, be clear on when you're going to use it. Do I use it pre-match in terms of before the warmup, do I use it walking onto the court? How do I want to use my music and how do I connect that with what my coach wants me to do? And I think keeping in mind that if you're flat, you're going to have to change things and fire them up and change your music to a faster music. And if you're overly anxious or energized and you want to calm down, you need to slow the music down, so you're going to have to make an adjustment.

19:01  
J: Awesome. And that's this week's episode of compete like a champion. Larry, that was awesome. I mean, who knew matching music to your game style? I mean, drop the mic. Boom. Love it. Um, until next week, we're going to have a, have a guest on the show, so make sure to tune in then. Larry?

19:20  
L: Hey, Johnny.

19:20  
J: Speak to you next week.

19:21  
L: Yeah, man. Let's do it next week.

19:22  
J: All right. Speak to you later.