

5 Things Coaches Should Start Doing Now

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SPEAKERS

Larry Lauer, Johnny Parks

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- J** Johnny Parks 00:05
Welcome to compete like a champion. You're here with Dr. Larry Lau, a mental skill specialist with USTA Player Development, and Coach Johnny Parks at IMG Academy. Today, we've got another episode for you. But before we get started, we're just gonna have to drop a quick apology to all the listeners. We haven't had a podcast here in a couple weeks. And there's good reason for that. The first week, I had completely lost my voice. Don't worry, it wasn't COVID. But I've completely lost my ability to speak for the whole week. So yeah, it was best that you didn't understand try to understand the muffled I guess co presenter here. And then And then last week, Larry was actually out at a tournament with a player that ended up winning the tournament. So Larry was out for the whole week, which will forgive him he was producing results for helping a player produce results and then helping a player out. So congrats on that, Larry, and apologies for the one before.
- L** Larry Lauer 00:58
Well, you know, first I mean, I thought maybe you're on the COVID protocol list, but I guess maybe IMG doesn't have a COVID protocol list, but just choking just joking. But it's good. We're gonna get those beautiful pipes back we need we need those English pipes going again .



Johnny Parks 01:14

Yeah. It's so happened to be during the week when my daughter turned four. And we had all these different activities planned for and so it was like nonstop water bottle and drinking trying to just get my throat cleared. And it was just a strange thing. It's not like I had a sore throat or anything. It was just, it was just scratchy and completely went into Barry Barry White mode. So probably could have re recorded his my first my last my everything song and done a pretty good recreation there. But anyway, we're all good. I would have paid to have heard that. Yeah, I think a lot of people would have paid not to hear that.



Larry Lauer 01:51

Yeah, probably right. Starting with your wife. But yeah, it was a good week. And, you know, at the tournament and exciting, you know, see a young player do well. And certainly, we don't just talk about the tenants, we actually go and work sometimes. So that's something that the audience needs to realize that we don't just talk all the time. Sometimes we just talk but yeah, you actually work as well. I guess so. Yeah. But uh, yeah, it was. It was a good week. Certainly, we've had a little bit of disruption in our schedule. But hopefully that means that the content is going to be unreal coming up, because we've had time to think



Johnny Parks 02:31

We have we have and we got, we got a few few crackers coming up. So hopefully, we'll enjoy that. But today we're focusing on like this title here, Larry, that you put together five things coaches should start doing now. Right now.



Larry Lauer 02:47

Now? Yes. Yes. The low hanging fruit, low hanging fruit JP.



Johnny Parks 02:55

the low hanging fruit. All right. Well, we like that. So, I mean, this is gonna be a bit, you know, this could be your show, Larry. So essentially, I'm really interested to hear about what, you know, What things? What coaches should be doing right now. And, you know, why don't you crack us off with the first one?



Larry Lauer 03:10

Yeah, well, you know, this came from the inside of my head, just thinking about, you know, watching coaches in my own coaching, and it was really hard to try and run a practice, and manage player behavior, and actually work on technique and tactics. And then, you know, I come in now 20 plus years later, as a mental coach saying, hey, you need to do these things psychologically with the players to make them better. And that's a lot to ask of a young coach can be overwhelming. So that's, that's where the whole genesis of this podcast came from. And then looking at it from another angle, you hear all the time, people say, wow, that coach gets it. He or she just communicates really well knows what to say, interacts great with the player can be hard on them and get results can be really empathetic and positive and get results. You know, they know, they know how to push the right buttons, right? You'll hear people say that, and I was thinking about that. And that's just something that takes time to develop. It's not you're not going to become a master coach, and you shouldn't, in a season or a year. So those things take time. But you know, how can we take step forward to get closer to being that effective and I thought we had some money said low hanging fruit things that coaches could be doing right now. That would benefit their coaching and would benefit their players and really wouldn't take too much headspace to try and do you could still do the other things you need to do organize a practice, run a great drill, teach technique, and all these other things. So I don't think you have to have a degree in psychology or sports psychology to do these things. Because people communicate well do these things already. You know, I think what we've done in psychology is to learn from people who are great at creating behavior change, and distilling down the most important lessons. And so if you start doing these things now, JP, I think they would have a large influence on your interactions with your players and actually creating change. So that's where the idea came from.



Johnny Parks 05:22

Yeah, I like like that a lot. Lot, Larry, and there's, there's always things they either catch myself doing, or when I observe other coaches doing it, I think, are like pretty decent delivery. But it'd be interesting to see if they flip flopped, how they phrase something, or the words that they use, because words do create pictures, right. And pictures can create behaviors. And so, you know, it's very, it's, we've got to constantly work at that. So, but anyways, alright, well, we'll take it away. Take us through these.



Larry Lauer 05:54

Yeah, so I think the first one that I hear people in general, and coaches do often and unlike myself as well, because it's impossible to be perfect. But that is telling players what you don't want them to do. Like, I'm around baseball a lot. And a coach might say, don't throw

it there. Don't throw it there. Well, okay, but especially the younger the player is you're not telling them what to do. And in tennis, it might be saying like, Hey, don't make mistakes? Well, I don't want to make mistakes as a player, right? So but what do you what are you telling me to do and, and so I think we too often tell the players what we want them to avoid, versus telling them what it is that will make them successful, tell them the action that they need to create that they need to generate. And that gives him a focus a way to move forward. And, you know, we have to understand that the brain doesn't compute don't. So if I think don't double fault. Oftentimes, the first thing goes through my head is a ball hitting the net. And that's called ironic processing. When you try to suppress a thought by saying don't, it actually makes it more likely you're going to think about it. And everybody knows about, like the white bear or the white elephant, everybody started, don't think about the white bear, the white elephant, and then all you can think about is this gigantic White Bear running around or white elephants. So when we as coaches tell players, what we don't want them to do, we're not reinforcing the action that we want them to take. And I know sometimes it can be hard to think of the action we want them to take. But these are ways that we have to kind of plan ahead, right? So if your player is making a number of unforced errors, saying, don't make mistakes, what are you going to say to them? Right? What can you tell them? That will actually help them perform better? I know JP, you have some ideas on something you would tell a player, if they're missing a lot, an action they can take, what's one action they can take right now that will help them just in general.



Johnny Parks 08:05

One action? Or it depends, okay, so an action is you could give them a tactical scenario, and explain to them that by Well, first of all, okay, if they make an error, okay, so a good example there, they make an error and go, okay, you don't want to miss in the net, right? Well turn that around and go, Okay, well, though, they know, they're not supposed to miss it in there, or miss long there. But then talk about, okay, if you were to get that shot, again, what might be a better option, where might be a better option to hit. And so they start recreating that, that situation in their mind and go off. Yeah, if I was to get that maybe I'd go short cross, or maybe go deep through the middle. So now quickly planting what they should do. So in the next time, a similar situation, ball comes up, you know, the thing that's only in their mind is the thing that they corrected on what they should be doing. So I think that happens a lot. And I think a lot of coaches, they kind of do the double barrel, right? They go, alright, well, you know, I don't want you to do this. Okay. But I do want you to do that. But you're still layering in the don't and the do. So you know, that can be a confusing message, rather than just pointing them straight to the thing that they can do. There's only one singular focus and that is creating a better solution to what what they just messed up with. And quite often, players don't want to hear that. You shouldn't do that.

Well done. No, yeah, I keep missing that shot. I probably know I shouldn't be doing that, you know, just reinforce, reinforce that I shouldn't be doing it. I kind of know that. Instead, let's guide them through what they could be doing, and let them come up with the answer. So I think I think that's very important. And I find myself doing that sometimes, too, right? You want to you're trying to help them understand why. So we think that by helping them understand the why we're going well, you don't want to do this because it leads to this which is a negative. Rather, we could be this because it could have this outcome. But again, that's a lot to say, right? I can't do this, because it will do that. But do this because it could help promote this. But that's a lot for somebody to take in after one this. So we have to simplify our coaching and just cut out the fluff really, and get straight to the point, in my opinion, to help them understand the why well, it might be helpful to go here, because it will help produce this outcome or help produce set up this next shot. Taking, you know, if I go through the middle I'm taking right you're you're taking away the angle, which will help promote setting up this next ball. So So now you're focusing on that, you know, in that case, it's a tactical situation. But anyways.



Larry Lauer 10:46

Right, you have, you definitely have options, and the coaches in the audience are gonna know, like yourself, they're gonna know better than I, but you can correct them directly with the action you want them to take. Or like you said, you could ask them, then get them to come up with the action. And there might be multiple choices, and then you can work through what's the best option. But when you start with don't do that, typically things are moving so fast. Oh, coaches are working with groups and have a lot of players. So if you're doing a one on one, maybe you have that time to really break it down and and show them the correct action and the thing that they did in the correct action again, like the wooden kind of demonstration, but when things are moving fast, and you got a lot of players to keep an eye on, you're best off just to tell them what it is that you want them to do. If you have a little bit more time than Why not ask them a question, what do you think? The ball over the net? And so instead of saying don't miss or why did you miss focus on the action you want them to take, and you're going to get much greater behavior change, to be honest, because they're gonna be thinking about what to do versus what to avoid.



Johnny Parks 12:00

And I think that's taking that positive coaching routes. You know, I think as well that we may emphasize the reason why you shouldn't do something as almost like not like a scare or kind of like a scare tactic. If you keep doing this, you keep gonna keep losing the point you do that enough, you're gonna lose a game, you're gonna lose a set. You know, it's the

same one, like, I find, I find myself stopping myself doing this when I'm teaching. So like a squat position, a squats really important. And the strength of that position is important for split steps, right? And getting into that strong athletic base. If the knees pitching inwards the whole time is we call it knee valgus. Right? When when we it's called knee valgus. And the legs are put in in a weakened position so that when they need to push off left or right, the strength of that that push is compromised. So you would go Okay, well, we want to try and push those knees out or push them over the toes a little bit. So we've got a strongest shape, that's going to promote strength. But often we'd be like, well, if you let your knees do this, they're in a weakened position, that's not a great position to be in, it's going to make you slow and blah, blah, blah, like, well, what's the point in saying all that just, you know, coach, the correction, I got this from Vern Gambetta, coach the correction goes straight to pointing out the thing that's going to help them do the right thing. And don't harp on, you know, harp on what they're doing wrong. Like they don't, sometimes they don't know what they're doing wrong, and they can't figure out why. So just pointing to the correction, and help them through that and guide them through understanding why that's a more effective position, or why that's a more effective shot. Or, you know why that's a more effective mental strategy in between points, right?



Larry Lauer 13:36

We either they don't know what to do, or they aren't focusing on it. So in either case, you need to bring their attention to the correct action. But this just kind of brings me to the second one. And a lot of times, we coach with ambiguity, we won't give specific information will say, you know, a good shot or a good job, or that could have been better, or you got to start playing better or whatever. Like there's ambiguity, you know, so it fits along with this one, tell them the action, we need to create really clear expectations for what we want from our players. And specifically with number two here, you know, the first one is to state the action, you want them to take state that positive action. The second one is, let's create create very clear expectations for how we want our players to train. Too often I see a lot of ambiguity as it relates to players knowing what to do in training. How am I supposed to act? When we're in a water break? How am I supposed to move between drills? Or if you're gonna if you're in a group setting and multiple players, what am I supposed to be doing when you know I'm not hitting the ball at that point, maybe I'm waiting, you know, it's a drill where two players are up and two are waiting or something like that. So we have to coach them on what we want. During the training, how we want their intensity, how we want their energy, what do we want them to focus on? How do they move between drills during the water breaks in create those clear expectations for their engagement. And that's certainly something that Jose Higuera has harped on to both of us as a very important to having successful practices. I think too often we either assume the players know, or we just want to jump right in and start hitting

balls, and we forget to really explicitly discuss and gain enlightenment on, this is how the practice is going to go. So you can get optimal engagement.



Johnny Parks 15:41

Yeah, I really like that. And there's something I mean, I've been what goes along with this one. So creating those specific and clear expectations is, what's interesting when explaining that because you get coaches that to explain that when they set up their session, what I find really interesting, and I think it's probably more Paramount, or noticeable an individual sport, is when a coach goes, Okay, this is what I need, I need you to do this, or here's what I want. I want you to do this. It's a very interesting statement that first of all, the statement, sort of more encroaches on a coach centered approach versus a player centered approach, because you're basically going well, this is what I want, right? This is what I need from you, even if it's well intentioned, ago, and I want you to do this so that it helps you do ABC. Okay, great. And the intention is still there for the player in mind. But by saying that a statement like that, I need you to do this, I want you to do this, you're almost letting them know that their opinion is not maybe as important as what the coach wants or needs. Now, there's no you know, if someone's paying for a lesson, they're paying for that coach's expertise, I get it. But there's a way to involve the player in this part of the decision making by finding out what they think about what they're about to do before you tell them, this is what I want from you, this is what I need from you. And I think that when you're setting up the expectations, that type of phrase, when laying out those expectations could alienate the athlete a little bit. I've seen it with you know, I've seen it myself. And and when I was younger, I probably that's probably how I described setting up the drill. Okay, here's what I want. I want this, I want that I don't want that. Right. I think that alienates an athlete to think in like that just conforming to what the coach wants, as opposed to involving them in in some of the decision making process by finding out what they think they want, or what they think that they need. And then you can build off that.



Larry Lauer 17:45

So you bring up some good points, JP, and if our goal is to develop independent players, because that's how the game of tennis is played, with independent thinkers making their own decisions without coaching help, then why would I want to engage in language that makes the practice about how I feel, or my opinions, right? I need to transfer that over. I am supposed to control the court because it needs to be safe. And it needs to be effective and efficient. But at the same time, it's your practice. But it's easy to find that I have to catch myself, it's not that I want you to do this, let's do this drill. Because this is what's best for you, this is going to help you. And then obviously getting their feedback. The older they are, the more feedback you get from them on things they want to do or how they

want to work. But in an even gap where you say, you know, when you're giving feedback, and it can be again, nonspecific feedback, but Oh, I like that. I like that. I love that. You're you're you're creating a an evaluatory situation where the player understands, even subconsciously that you know, how you feel is being dictated by how they perform. Now, some people might be sitting back and thinking, well, that's a strong statement, Larry, I'm not sure that's the case. But if you really talk to the players, when when a beginner language becomes more coach centered, they realize that they're being evaluated, and they're down there trying to make the coach happy, versus trying just to do the work and make themselves better.



Johnny Parks 19:22

Yeah, absolutely. I 100% agree with that. Again, I just think it's embeds very important that how we set up, I mean, a good example there is okay, you know, that there's something I know that we need to work on, that this player needs to work on. Okay. Why not introduce it in a way that go, hey, let me roll something by you. Let me let me see what you think about this. What do you think about focusing on those deep balls where you have to you know, go back and and try and neutralize those balls a bit better. I feel like sometimes when you're playing, you get caught back there. And maybe not produces greater, greater ball. As you could do, what do you think about that? How do you feel about that? And then see what they think they go, you know what, like, I actually feel like I deal with that ball pretty well. Okay. Or they might go, Yeah, I agree, I find it hard to get out of defense whenever I'm pushed back. Okay, and then Okay, well, why do you think that is? As I don't gain court position, after I hit the ball, I get stuck back or I don't create enough depth whatever it may be. Now that that type of dialogue dives into figuring out what they think of that scenario that you would like to work on with the player, I think that creates a bit of a deeper buy in from the player so that when you set up the drill, and again, a drill is a drill, you can create thousands of drills, but what you're doing is getting the player to buy into the skill that is then layering out the very specific expectation of what it is you're about to work on. Because you've involved them in that process. And I think by doing that, we're creating a deeper meaning more purposeful practice to what it is they're about to do. I think that that again, I mean, we've talked about this in the past, I think a couple times now. But that leads more into the transformational type of coaching that positive coaching as opposed to the transaction, which is okay, you pay me to give you a lesson, I'm going to tell you what to do you do it. Okay. But, you know, if the athlete the player shows up and had a bit of rough day at school and isn't wholly switched on, and then they're just being given a directive might just feel that they're being lectured by a, you know, a teacher, again, or or parents. So, hey, let's, let's be a bit more human here, we're going to lay out these expectations and get quite specific here, but involve them in that process of how we get to working on the skills that we know that the player needs to

work on.



Larry Lauer 21:44

Yeah, so let me put it back in context. So I started with a young coach, or maybe an inexperienced coach, trying to do all these different things and trying to give some advice that I think would help players immediately and create behavior change faster, if you're creating clear expectations on how you want them to train how things are going to go. And you're gaining alignment, because you're talking with them about it. And, you know, again, the younger they are, it's more expressing here's what's going to make the practice go well. And the older they get, the more it's a discussion, but get into to write those things down. Because if it's just in their head, you don't really know if they internalize that, if they understand it, if they know what it feels like, No, we talked about working hard, but we really know what that means. And so the more that you can be explicit about your expectations, I want you to run for every ball, there you go, I want to meet this expectation, you would run for every ball and try to get your racket at least your frame on even if it's out. So now you're you're creating much clearer expectations for the behavior that you would like to see. And this helps the players then to know what it's going to take to meet expectations. And I think you have to restate it often. And you reward it when you see it and you hold them accountable in a in a positive way. When you don't see it.



Johnny Parks 23:10

So even with that statement, then you could layer that with Why do you think it's important to run to every ball? And even if it's out and get a racket on it? Why is that important? Because, again, if you just come out and go, Well, I want you to chase down every ball, or I want you to run balls, even if they're out. Some players, depending on prior experiences might actually perceive that as Oh why is the coach trying to punish me? If the balls out, it's out. Why are they making me chase everyone's balls that are out. Right that some players legitimately think that is like a form of punishment that go, Well, why is that important that we chase every ball down? Even if it's out what habits that creating? And they might come up with, you know, then they start to think about it right? Whatever they think about that they'll give their answer. But generally it comes back to always giving obviously, full effort to every single ball no matter what, being prepared for anything, right? When might blow that ball back in a little bit. And you didn't chase it down because it looked like it was going out you've just given up a point. So either way, I think that's you know, that's that's a great point you lay out the expectations are pretty firm, but still asked about the importance of, of why that is so that that communication maybe doesn't get skewed from Coach giving a directive and play not understanding why.



Larry Lauer 24:25

Yeah, and again, at the end of the day, what you want is a player motivated to change. To learn faster, better, more completely. So the behavior changes sustained. So that's what we talk about these things. And again, we see veteran coaches also not do these things. So it's not just someone who's young and inexperienced. I'd like to think you and I are both experienced and we still have to check our language and the way we communicate and make sure we do these things because it's a constant process where you're trying to make sure you're reaching the player And they are independently motivated to do these things. But I think that, you know, as we talk about this moving into the third one, then and that is why we need to teach technique. And I know we people on who listened to this podcast religiously we know there's a few out there, you can focus on technique. But I think a lot of times, we need to talk more about problem solving and competing, in figuring things out. I know, we can talk about that from a motor skills perspective, which we've done, and we're going to do again, you could talk about it from a psychological or perspective. But I personally, JP, I don't know what you think, but I think I do. But I'd rather have someone who, you know, their technique isn't pristine, but they're fall within the parameters. But who are committed, they're a fighter, they're resilient, they problem solve. And we see some of those players, you know, at the pro level, versus someone who has pristine technique. But when push comes to shove, they back down, they they're not really ready to battle. And it's not to say that, obviously, we have great players who do both. But I think sometimes we focus so much on the technique, especially the younger ages, at the expense of developing great competitors.



Johnny Parks 26:23

Yeah, that's, that's a great point. I think when you talk about competing and problem solving, you're talking about character traits, you're talking about influence of, first of all, influence of DNA, and then influence of parents. And then influence of their first coaches in a sport doesn't necessarily have to be tennis, the first experience playing on a soccer team and, or whatever it may be, those are character traits that I think are built from a young age, the ability to compete and the ability to problem solve, but those are the things that are an absolute must, must, no getting away from it, you can't be a bad competitor at the highest levels of college, and the highest levels of pros, the highest levels of juniors.



Larry Lauer 27:08

You're not just gonna switch it on.



Johnny Parks 27:10

Right, you can't just switch it on. And if you do switch it on, and it's it's kind of one off here, one off there, it's not consistent. So you might produce a result one time, but you're not going to keep producing results, because it's not a consistent habit. technique is something that can can be developed, right, very quicker than I think character traits. So if you if you are slightly outside the parameters, you can get somebody inside the parameters fairly quickly. And then when they're inside the parameters, and and great, you know, they they're good to go. But competing and problem solving. That's me takes years and years to build.



Larry Lauer 27:47

And reinforce. Sorry, JP over time, because the problems change the degree of difficulty changes, right as you move up. And you know, I think that so much efforts put into getting this great technique. But then you create a fragile competitor because the technique has to be working like I have to be hitting well feeling the ball well, otherwise, I can't play. And I think I'm not asking for the other extreme. What I'm suggesting is more time in practice, where players are put in situations where they have to figure things out. And not so much focus and feedback on technique like okay, what do you what would you do here? Right. So if you have players are going to play tournaments, you owe it to them to put them in situations and talk about how to compete in those situations and figure it out. Because you can have the best technique in the world, but it almost works against you in some ways, because when it's not there when the execution is not there. And, and trust me, even great technique breaks down under stress for multiple reasons. Those folks have a hard time of really being gritty, playing dirty tennis, when you know winning ugly, whatever you want to call it, Brad Gilbert, because the emphasis has been so much on technique and producing this perfect technique that when it's not there when it's not happening, you know, they don't really have anything to fall back on.



Johnny Parks 29:22

Yeah, no, exactly. And I know from a motor learning perspective, we've got a podcast coming up where we're going to dive a little bit more into this and the why and the science behind you know, too much focus on technique. But just just to kind of from my perspective, too, for for a tennis coach that's maybe overly technical, mostly overly like we all have slight biases in our coaching towards what we're looking at some other grips in swing shape and very highly technical. someone like myself has always been obsessed with movement. So I'm looking more from a movement ability standpoint, every coach has A little bit of their own bias. And I think as a coach, you've got to be careful that how you come across from session to session is also training the way that they think when

they're on the court. So if you're overly technical, you might be inadvertently, making the player overly technical. And then they come into the competitive arena. And that's all they think about is the technical side. And as we know, from research and studies are shown, when you're thinking about technique under pressure, stress and anxiety of competition, performance goes down. But that's that's the side that we're going to dive a little bit closer into, when we talk a little bit more about this on the on a future podcast. But



Larry Lauer 30:39

It's a great plug there for the future. And, and look, I mean, as coaches, we've also mentioned this, your training their self talk, the way they perceive the world the way they perceive the court. And so if it's nonstop technical feedback comments, then they are going to only focus on technique in most cases, unless, like you said, their DNA or their socialization or upbringing, is different than then maybe that ends up actually being a more of a balancing act. But in most cases, I would say that's not the case. So all I'm asking for JP is, if you're a highly technical coach, and that's great, we need great technical coaches, give them space to work on things tactically, mentally, emotionally, have them play matches, put them in situations, give them feedback on things other than technique. And just be aware that, you know, when you're competing, depending on what your goal is, again, the more you talk about technique, the more challenging it gets to compete. And we need to train, how to compete at times, and not be bringing in the technical feedback. So that that's the kind of the, that's definitely the message there. So, Alright, ready to move along?



Johnny Parks 32:03

Let's do it.



Larry Lauer 32:04

So I was thinking about this. And the first three are very much about teaching skills, right, and how we communicate, and how we create behavior change, which every every coach needs to learn, right. And so as you're, as you're coaching your players, be thinking about how you would bring these techniques into your coaching, be aware of maybe at times where you slip away from these things, I mean, I do it too. And just be aware of that. But this fourth one is a matter of, honestly, I think something where again, maybe we just don't put enough emphasis on this. And we don't truly give it the importance that it deserves. And that's having players trained with pressure, younger players, pressure is just trying to produce a shot, playing whatever game you put in front of them. So you don't

really have to do a lot extra. We're not trying to develop competitors, we are trying to develop competitors, but we're not trying to overwhelm them at a young age with a bunch of consequences and tough conditions. Right? When you have a young player who's still learning how to hit their groundstrokes, 40 mile per hour wind bursts is not the best thing for them. But you have a veteran player, maybe you have a 16 year old who's pretty good tennis player who goes and plays tournaments, playing in the wind is good for them. And those in the very next tournament they may play in 40 mile per hour wind gusts and how are they going to respond to that? How are they going to figure out the conditions right JP and, and to produce their tennis as best as they can. So I wouldn't encourage coaches I know even this is a little bit been bent towards more coaches who are starting out or a little bit more inexperienced, but also veteran coaches. Because again, this is not just for the inexperienced coaches, train with specificity, simulate the competitive environment, put the pressure on the players when you've developed them. And I'm not saying they have to be at a high performance level to play with pressure. And then, ethically what we have to do if you're going to put pressure on them. So pressure, maybe just playing matches in front of people could be you know, the conditions we put on them. constraints, for example, but if we're going to do that, then I think we have to teach them how to cope with pressure. And again, now this might be going outside the realm of a young coach. But I think we offer a lot of pretty simple practical advice in this podcast, but get them engaging in very simple routines even. So you put the pressure on them, and then have them do that breath and believe technique. They start missing. Take a step away from the baseline. Take a couple deep breaths. Think about one thing you're going to do when you go to the point. The next point when you go to the baseline maybe it's something There, you've been telling them in practice. And the more you plan this and you practice it, the better they get at responding well to pressure, they start focusing on the task at hand in the present and committing to it, versus worrying about previous mistakes or worrying about what if I miss the next ball? What if I lose? What if my parents gonna think about how I'm planning, so you're training them to have focus to have a disciplined mind by doing this under pressure. And then you want to support them through it, right, you want to encourage them, you want to support them to use routines to deal with things in a good way. And certainly giving them the space to work on it, but then stepping in when they're struggling, and helping them with some advice. But I think if we're going to put players in pressure situations, we owe it to them to simulate that as best as we can in practice, and get away from so much grooving. And I think playing a lot more practice matches, and playing under pressure. And again, the types of pressure changes player get older.



Johnny Parks 36:07

Yeah, that's, that's a great important point. To deal with pressure, we've got to try and

simulate pressure. In practice, it's as simple as that. And we've got to, you know, dealing with this with the player at the minute is, you know, they may practice really great. You think all the efforts there and the engagements there, and they practice really great, and, but when they come to a match, and the pressures on, everything sort of breaks down, and then you come back and say, well, they train really well. But I think there's a balance between training really well, but then also training really well and putting your mind in a place yourself, putting your mind under your own pressure to perform when you're competing in practice. As opposed to thing I was just practice, you know, who really cares? I say, you know, well, the reality is, is not everyone could switch it on and off for matches, and then go back to the practice call and just purely focus on the skill and then go back to matches and switch it on. For the majority. I mean, some who were fortunate to do that, I mean, good for them, I think the oldest someone gets and the more in tuned they are with, with their level, their skills, I think, you know, you can, you can somewhat control that a bit more. Because you don't have those issues of competing and all that problem solving that mission number three, but we have to create habits of creating an importance to competing in practice, for athletes almost to feel like they're putting that pressure on themselves, is an important balance, you know, and again, I mean, something, you know, we're talking about context, rarely. And context is another thing, we're going to dive a bit deeper to on on a future podcast as well.



Larry Lauer 37:43

You just want to prepare them for that stress response. And, you know, I know the argument. And I understand it, that if technically, they're sound, and they can hit every shot, then they should hold up the pressure. Unfortunately, that just doesn't always work out that way. Obviously, we want them to be technically sound and be able to hit all the shots that's going to help them to deal with pressure. But at the same time, if you if you don't really put those things under pressure, do you know that they're going to hold up, because getting them in a drilling environment is far different than when you're being evaluated, you're being watched the points count for the score, and there's something on the line completely different. And you have to train in both. And you have to give the players a chance to work through those feelings that stress response bot response and figure out how to deal with it. And so this is not a either or situation. This is an situation where we want to develop the player skills to a level where they have confidence to do everything they need to do in a match. At the same time, we have to put them under pressure and test those things. Otherwise, they're not going to have the confidence to produce those things under pressure. And finally, I would say you know, JP, that in terms of applying pressure, okay? That is going to be dependent upon the age and the stage. Again, the older they are playing different players playing in front of people is good. I'm not talking about punishing people with exercise and stuff like that. I'm talking about the

actual conditions that you play under, put him in those situations, habit count. And maybe sometimes there's something on it, you know, the loser buys lunch for the opponent or the one that players hate is doing laundry or stuff like that, but you can have fun little things. But these extra things really kind of crank it up and get their minds engaged even though it's it's a practice that makes it feel a little bit more competitive. I don't want to lose sight on this one though JP that if we are going to put players under pressure and we need to prepare them for the inherent pressure of playing a tennis match the stress response, then we must give them skills and support them through it. But it can't just leave them on unprepared for what's to come. And don't just think that they're going to figure out because they have a good forehand. Maybe early on, because they're just better than everybody. But at some point, it catches up. So we need to be teaching them how to breathe and create a space between the stimulus and the response, we need to teach him how to think, you know, to think about solving the problem and to think about their strengths and focusing in on actions, just what we were talking about in this podcast versus what's wrong with me being judgmental, focus on the past, focusing on the future. These are extremely valuable skills, coping skills, mental skills that they'll need in tennis and in life, and we can start working on that at a young age. And finally, we know this from the games approach, right, Johnny, that if you put players in a game situation, to play the game, they'll be forced to do certain things that they won't do in drills, they try to figure it out. And so sometimes I know that we want to focus on the drill and the technique, but a lot of learning occurs when you say like, Alright, here's the situation, go and play and and see what you come up with, you know, and that more explored exploring the game versus it being sort of, you know, fed to them, you know, every single step of the way and being shown the steps versus Well, let's, let's go and figure this out. Let's go, go play this small game cross court game and see if you can figure out how to be successful in this game.



Johnny Parks 41:33

Yeah, that's a great point thing, just the games games approach, allows them allows you as the coach to just see their level of creativity, for being able to figure out how to perform at that particular exercise or drill. So as you say, those exploration skills can be can be seen, and obviously, if not, that links back to problem solving. So if they're problem solving skills, and not up to par for what is going to be required, then that tells you something about what you're going to program into your practices, maybe for the next session in the session, after were saying, you know, just like being so heavily technical, you can't just do games all the time. But certainly sprinkling in a few more few more of those so that you give them opportunities to problem solve those is key in that but those that's those great point. So I was this was this fifth one, then?



Larry Lauer 42:28

Let's wrap it right, because we're getting a little long, and maybe I'm getting long winded. But



Johnny Parks 42:32

No, this is quality world class stuff.



Larry Lauer 42:35

World Class, world class. All right, I like it. So now one thing that I see. And again, I think that sometimes coaches look at this differently, but not every mistake needs fixing. And let me tell you why. Because when we start to focus on on what is wrong, it's like being mechanic, right? Or our doctor, right, I'm just going in fixing things, and I'm not sure necessarily what they should do, but I'm just fixing them, like, there's something wrong with you, I'm gonna fix you. And so what we've got to do is to focus more on acceptance of our mistakes. Because tennis inherently has a lot of unforced errors. You don't you don't see Djokovic playing a match without an unforced error. Like it's part of the game, obviously, we don't want to make a lot of them where you can't be successful. But it's the fear of making these mistakes that's built into constant correction. That makes it hard for players to play. So in a lot of players are trained this way, if you miss, you know, clearly you made a mistake, and you got to make an adjustment. So their their routine is alright, if I miss, I got to go and fix, I gotta correct. And then I go play the next point. First off, that's a lot of judgment, to be throwing into performance situation, right? If we, if we normalize, that mistakes are gonna happen, we say, Well, you know what happens. And we just focus on our game plan, as I think I'm far more effective approach than constantly fixing things because like a coach who's constantly fixing, you're going to start giving yourself 10, 20 pieces of feedback and your short term memory, you can't handle it all. And then the important stuff is going to be out with the bathwater is going to flush out so you become way too one focused and scattered. Using this approach. It also be it builds in a fear of failure because if you're constantly correcting, you're constantly focusing on what's wrong, you're going to want to start to avoid that. You don't want to have to constantly correct yourself because that's bad, that's bad. What I've encouraged players and coaches to do is look, not every mistake needs fixing. Let's accept them as part of the game and then if it is mistakes, you keep seeing it's repetitive one couple times, then yeah, go back, forgot what you need to do and come back to work. I obviously don't want you to make the same mistake over and over again. Or if it's, it's a really poor mistake. Okay? If you feel like you need to correct it, that's fine. But an over focus on corrections really makes our players judgmental of themselves focused on the past, worried about the future, and having a hard time being in the presence of the present, which is where performance

actually happens.



Johnny Parks 45:33

Yeah, that's, that's a great point. And here's the interesting thing about this one, right, that there's a, again, another balance, because we've talked about how you want to catch those teachable moments. But if you are constantly trying to fix every miss, i.e., the coach jumps in to give the directive on the correction, right? Like you need to be doing this. Every single time, which can happen a lot in practice can happen every other point. If you're thinking about winning 50% of points, or 55% of points, and it's 45 to 50% of the time you're going to be jumping in and telling them is the fix



Larry Lauer 46:12

Literally you look wrong. You lost the point.



Johnny Parks 46:14

Yeah, the quick fix short, is sort of short sighted to just step in and always do the quick fix. And we think we're doing our job by doing that. But like you said, to incorporate acceptance and commitment is to go Okay, well, you got to accept that you're gonna make mistakes, because the reality is, is 45%, if you're going to win a match, you're going to lose maybe 45% of the points, you have to accept to lose points. Otherwise, you're just going to be playing in complete turmoil every time you miss a ball. But then it's a commitment to figuring out what the solution is to that. So you do want to catch learning, especially when the same error happens over and over. But at the same time, you need to create space, so that they can figure out the fixing themselves. So, you know, don't want this to sound contradictory, because it's not you need to help them learn through that. And that's the that's the how, how do you as a coach, help them learn from those misses. But that really only comes to when you start seeing a habit. And if you have opened them up with questioning, and try to help them figure out the solution, and they're still just not getting it, then that might be a time to kind of talk a little bit deeper about it. But yeah, there's a fair balance there. I feel,



Larry Lauer 47:35

I think so. And this is where black and white just doesn't work in coaching the extremes. Because there are, you know, situations, there are certain misses that we would call goodnesses, where you you, your intentions were great. And you went for the shot, and it just happened to go out because execution is not perfect, you can't totally control

execution as much as we'd like to think we can. So there are good misses and there are misses that it's just unnecessary to correct them. Because if you just allow yourself to play, you will come right back up to your performance. But the more you focus on what's wrong, the harder it gets to get back to the performance. final thing I'll say about that, JP is that the more that we train our players to correct every miss, we make them emotionally reactive. Because I'm constantly judging myself, that was good, that was bad. That was good, that was bad. You're making it more likely they're riding that emotional roller coaster, right? versus like it is what it is. It's a point on the next one, here's my game plan. And so I think that, in some ways we train in fear of failure and emotional reactivity by making players so sensitive to their misses. It's part of the game. It's how we learn. And if you're being aggressive, you're gonna miss.



Johnny Parks 48:56

That's, again, another massively important point in training their mindset, and their approach towards competition and practice. You know, are we inadvertently training, a fear of failure, through the way that we are? pointing out? misses really is huge. Awesome. Larry, have you have you got Have you got anything to finish on there? I mean, that's five extremely important points that you've brought up and taught us through there. And, and just again, I mean, it's just those little coaching nuggets that can make such a huge difference in our delivery that just enhance learning, which improves performance. It's just huge. Yeah.



Larry Lauer 49:40

Just to finish out, you know, these don't supplant the coaching philosophy. These are techniques relating to the player to teaching that fit within a philosophy. And so every coach needs to have a clear philosophy of how they create changing their players, how they teach what's important whether their values are. So I don't want to come across that you do these five things and you're doing your job, no, this is part of your job. The other thing I would say is, you know, for your own change, or to better yourself, because this is what this is about always making ourselves better. Pick one, pick one that you feel like you're ready to do, or that you feel you really must do to help your players to become a better coach. And really make it a priority. You know, when I go out there to practice when I make sure that I'm telling them the action that I want to see that I that will make them successful. I'm going to make sure my expectations are clear before every drill. Before every practice, I'm going to focus more on problem solving and competing. In my practice, this week, I'm going to give them time to play points and work through things and ask them questions to see how they're solving the puzzle, right and help them along with that, I'm going to put them under pressure. So that they get they can better transfer

their skill development into matches. Indoor, I'm going to help them understand that misses are part of the game. And let's focus on the next step versus always trying to correct things. And then in creating this emotional roller coaster and this fear of failure. So I tried to give five things. And again, I make these mistakes, too, I really tried to not make them any more by really reminding myself. So maybe this podcast is as much to remind myself is to help other coaches. But to me, when you when you stop paying attention to these things, then they start to slip and then you're not as effective as a coach and as a young coach coming up or an inexperienced coach, you can do these things and still be really focused on your practice and running a good practice. And I think you owe it to yourself and to your players to do your best to bring these things in because your practices are going to be far more effective. I think if you do this.



Johnny Parks 52:05

Larry, absolutely brilliant points and appreciate you putting this together. I mean, I'm sure there's obviously other points. But as you mentioned, this isn't like replacing a philosophy. There's just part of our job and how we get better keeping ourselves in check constantly, so that we can keep improving and keep developing us our teaching and our coaching. So really appreciate you spend the time to put this together and talking us through this. Great insights.



Larry Lauer 52:29

All good man always good JP. So hopefully, it's helping those winners.



Johnny Parks 52:33

Awesome. Awesome. It's definitely helped me so appreciate it. I will that's a wrap for this week's episode of compete like a champion. For more information, you can visit playerdevelopment.usta.com you can reach out to Larry and I via Twitter at Larry Lauer or at Johnny Parks One, drop us a message drop us a line with any comments or questions or any suggestions that you have. For podcast topics. We're always happy to speak to our listeners. But yeah, so we're gonna close it down for this week and then we'll be back next week with another episode. So until then, Dr. Lazur and I are checking out.