

## **Producing Tennis Playing Athletes with Vern Gambetta**

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Hi, I'm David Ramos, senior manager of coaching education and performance analytics. And you're listening to compete like a champion.

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J: Welcome to compete like a champion podcast. You're here with Dr. Larry Lauer mental skill specialist and coach Johnny Parks with USTA player development. Today we have a very special guest master athletic development coach Vern Gambetta. Welcome to the podcast.

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L: Welcome Vern.

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V: Pleasure to be here. I've really enjoyed my two days here and learned a lot. So yeah, it's really been fun.

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J: It's been, it's been awesome having you in and you've been able to see, we've had a couple of junior camps going on, boys' camps, girls' camps, so you've been able to spend some time with the girls, coaches, the boys, coaches, our strength and conditioning team, athletic medicine team, and now our mental skills team. Mental performance team, sorry.

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L: I'm one of them anyway, so. Man, I'm looking forward to this talk. I hear a lot about you, Vern. A lot of great ideas, so I'm looking forward to digging in here and see what your thoughts are on stuff. But, uh, you want to kick it off JP?

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J: Yeah. So just to T up for the, for the listeners, Vern is currently the director of Gambetta sports training systems. He's been been the conditioning coach for several teams in major league soccer as well as the conditioning consultant for us men's world cup soccer team is the former director of conditioning for the Chicago White Sox and director of athletic development for the New York Mets. Internationally recognized as an expert training and conditioning for sport, having worked with world class athletes and teams in a variety of sports. And you'd mentioned to me also about you'd spend some time with Monica Seles and another player that's now, I think she's in college, but it was a very, very good junior or is a very good player still. Yeah. You know, you do lots of speaking around the world. Most currently with Singapore swimming.

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V: Yeah. I'll be going to Australia in January and then England in January and, and uh, and don't forget the gain network.

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J: Absolutely. So I was going to mention it.

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V: It's my main focus. So you, you've, you've authored six books and over a hundred articles, but the, I think the book that I think everyone, has helped so many people is your book on, on athletic development. It's an incredible book. And you know, I really enjoyed reading it. It gave me a lot of, a lot of help in my learning as I apply athletic development within our sport. So I think that's

fantastic. And as you mentioned, you run the Gain network, GAIN and that's a week long. Well how, I'll let you...

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V: Well, it's, it's, it was inspired by something that I did early in my coaching career and what I saw the British athletics doing at [inaudible] in the early seventies were week long coaching schools. And I just felt it's something I always wanted to do. I had taught a seminar called building and rebuilding the athletes since 1992 and I'd always say it was two days and you just scratched the surface. I would say, would this be really neat if we had five days? And... So in 2007, we finally pulled the trigger and we did it and we had 12 brave people, and now it's up to what, 80 or 90 and that's all we want anymore and we do it once a week. And the whole goal is to cover the gamut of, it's, there's, there's various thrust, it's physical education or it's medicine, athletic medicine, athletic development, sports coaching, and physical, I said physical education. Yeah. And, uh, and as you know, it's an intense, it's really an intense five days. I mean, when we start at 6:30 in the morning and go as late at night as you want informally, but you know, and that. And the whole goal is to, is to get people together. It's, it's a network to be able to share ideas. And I mean we've seen, I mean that's part of one of the reasons I'm here is, you know, we met through, through Ed, Ed Ryan, who's a member of the network and you know, and it's, it's been a, it's, it's, I, I hate to say legacy, but I, I hope, I hope eventually that's a legacy and that's what my focus is now 50 years into this journey, you know, is more on the game network and interacting with the... That's what I'm doing in Australia. I mean, uh, both, both places I'm going in Australia or you know, this impetus was the Gain. Same thing with, with Singapore swimming and it looks like I'm going to be invited to go back down with some coach development stuff, you know, so, so for me now it's about coaching coaches more than being on the field or on the court or in the weight room or something like that, you know, which is I think a logical extension as it should be at, in your coaching career. Learn from my mistakes.

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L: There you go. We all make them, right.

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V: For sure.

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L: More than enough of them out there.

[04:18](#)

V: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

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J: Well, I've been very fortunate to attend the last two years. And as you said, Ed Ryan, I think he saw me one day monkeying around in the gym and, and climbing around and do all this, do a lot of functional stuff, do a lot of stuff for tennis and then just overall, you know, I take an interest in it. And he was, I think, you know, I talked to Ed about my passion and how we can connect athletic development to the tennis skill development. And he was like, you know, there's this, this, this network that you might be really interested in. And then you accepted me onto the, onto the week. And what's great about it is we start off every morning, morning madness and we get out there and we have all

these great instructors, teachers, coaches that take us through different elements. Whether.

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V: You actually do it, yeah.

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J: We actually do it.

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V: But it's really high level teaching. I mean, and it's, it's really evolved. Last year, Ed and I kind of stood in the middle of the field and just go like, this is amazing. You know, like the, the level of, I mean we've got guys leading groups that are coaching world cup teams and that we've got coaches of world cup teams attending. Eddie Jones, coach of England attended this. You know, it's, it's, it's an amazing atmosphere. It's really cool.

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J: It was superb, I mean it connects the practical application from the theory, the best practices, leading science, everything is incorporated. There's, you know, we cover topics about, you know, there's mental performance or mental development in their too. And that's really a lot of what we talk about obviously with compete like a champion is how we, how we connect to, to the mental performance. And so, you know, I think, I think as we sort of go down rabbit holes here, maybe just give us a, an insight into your philosophy with athletic development.

[05:50](#)

V: Yeah, I mean the whole idea of athletic development, it's just that. We want to, in this case we're talking about tennis, we want to develop better tennis athletes. Okay. And this beast called strength and conditioning probably started really in a formal manner in American football. Well actually as early as the late 1950s but was heavily pun intended, heavily embraced in the, in the late eighties in a college environment. And then the pro environment. And I just never liked the term strength and conditioning. I was, uh, my, my background is track and field, although I did play American college football. So I started... This, this is where this whole idea of developing the all around athlete. I competed in the decathlon. I knew what that was all about. You know, you run, jump, you throw, there's a certain amount of stamina required, but you know, you've got to balance a lot of things. So, so that's really what the philosophy of athletic development is. You're going to look at speed, strength, power, suppleness, stamina, technique and the various mental components, focus, you know, all those kinds of things. And you're going to put those together in a systematic approach, comprehensive systematic approach to develop the athlete, you know, sequentially. And the goal being to develop the most robust athlete and resilient athlete ready to thrive in the competitive arena. And we can't lose sight of that. We can't go down rabbit holes and say, Oh, it's about a one RM in strength training. It's about getting their 20 meters sprint better. It's all of that. Those might be parts of it at various times. But I think the key word, and this is something I started down this journey 50 years ago, was to really look at a system, develop a system to approach, and we were talking about this this morning, not just a system to develop the athletes, but in parallel to develop the coaches, you know, and and that, so the athlete in a lot of times seeing here

even this week and just talking to one of the boys and one of the girls right now at the end of this session, you know, they go back and have their individual coaches and as they grow as tennis players and grow in proficiency, you would like their coach to grow in proficiency to kind of an escort system. Well, it's very important that their coach also understands that it's not, that it's not about hitting more balls, but it's about okay... And fitness isn't sending them on three mile runs. You know, it's how do I, how do I help now make them a better tennis playing athlete, which means again, this idea of resilience and robustness so that they can, you know and you look at the draw in these big tournaments and you see how many great players can't start or drop out after the first match sometimes, or sometimes the first game of the first match. And I feel you've got me on a little bit of a soapbox here, but I feel like some of that is, is because it's been biased one-sided training. Certainly you've got to play tennis to be a good tennis player, to be a great tennis player. But then what do you do to support the, the ability to play tennis better? Well, you need a certain amount of strength. You need a certain amount of speed, eat a certain amount of agility. So finding how to mix that is really what... And we have to work. The athletic development coach is working in a close partnership with the skill coach. The tennis coach with sports medicine, you know, with, with everybody, it should be a team behind the player. You know, that's, to me, really important.

[09:09](#)

L: What I hear, Vern, is this holistic development of the athlete, right?

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V: Precisely.

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L: And you need a system to create that because, and at least in American culture, we develop a lot of specialists, right?

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V: Yes.

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L: People who are really good at a certain thing and then they drop that on the athlete. But what you're suggesting is looking at the whole athlete and deciding how do you develop that system that supports the well-rounded holistic development?

[09:33](#)

V: Absolutely. I mean that's, that's very well put. And, and it's it, you know, it's, it sounds, and I'm not a complexifier, I'm a simplifier. And so if you take a step back and you say, okay, well what, what are we here for? Well, we're here, we're here to help develop a better tennis player. Well, you know, you can't, you can't live like a chump and compete like a champ, you know, so you gotta, you gotta look at the whole person. We've got to learn how to understand what that boy or girl, man or woman needs in terms of how you communicate. Okay. And we're all gonna work together, you know, to, to, to find the best means of reaching that athlete and giving them the tools that they need. None of us are proficient enough to go on the court and play the match for him, I don't think. I'm not, he might be, but.

[10:17](#) L: He's close. He thinks...

[10:18](#) J: Still living in a dream.

[10:21](#) V: Yeah. Right, right, right. So yeah, that's pretty much what it is. Yeah.

[10:25](#) L: In tennis historically, and it may be similar to golf and maybe other sports, there's been a sense that we've overemphasized the technical aspects of the sport to the inhibition of other parts of the development of athletes. Have you run into that and what have the barriers been and how do we overcome that?

[10:41](#) V: Yes. I would say tennis is a good example of that. Baseball hitting is a good example of that. Golf, if I want a good laugh, I watch the golf channel when there's certain instructors on and if you want to be confused, it's just like unbelievable. Like how could you even swing the club after you go through this? They make it so much... I, I think I used this analogy yesterday. Two nights ago on, on PBS, there was a special on Leonardo da Vinci on Mona Lisa. There's a big exhibition on Leonardo da Vinci right now at the Louvre and Leonardo DaVinci didn't paint Mona Lisa with paint by numbers, right? He didn't have, one is blue, two is red, you know, like that. He mixed the colors. He had a blank palette and he mixed the colors. And I think this, this idea of what we've done, that really is, we've, we've taken the creativity away from the athlete, the ability to express themselves through the sport movement by making it robotic. You know, here's, here's step one, here's step two, here's step three. Now, I don't want to give people the wrong impression that we're, we're going to teach them the fundamentals. We're going to show them video. Show up, you know, you walk it, chalk it, and talk it, chalk it and walk it. I learned that 55 years ago at Fresno state.

[11:56](#) L: Okay, so you talk it, you, wait, say that again.

[11:58](#) V: Talk it. So you give them a, you give them a verbal explanation in very simple terms of what the objective is. Chalk it means you can either show video or show sequence photos or something like that. And then now you start walking through it. I saw Richard Ashby today just showing these two, they, they'd done serving and he went back and I was just like, I was almost in tears. I'm going like this, and I told him, I said, yesterday, I said you could go coach any sport in a week cause he has this ability to, to, to and and then, and then let the athlete express themselves. Don't try to fit them into a box, you know? And, and so what is perfect technique? I don't know, Roger Federer is a good tennis player, but if we really pick it apart, we're going to find flaws in his game. But he plays the way Roger Federer needs to play with his body, his mindset to play optimum tennis. You know? And uh, and I, and I think what we've done over the years, and again I'm reflecting on 50 years in a lot of different sports. I, I think we've killed initiative at times. We've discouraged athletes, you know, by making things so mechanical and trying to fit them into a mold. You know.

- [13:05](#) L: That's a great point cause I think coaches get really frustrated about players who don't show initiative and yet we may actually be coaching that out of them. Is that what we're saying?
- [13:13](#) V: Safe to say. Yeah. I think, I think it is safe to say, you know, so...
- [13:17](#) L: You point out one other good thing Vern, sorry I'm getting fired up now. I'm jumping in.
- [13:22](#) J: Go. Run with it.
- [13:22](#) L: You were, you were also pointing out like with coach Richard covering the different preferences for how people learn.
- [13:29](#) V: That's really basically what you're doing when you say talk it, walk it, chalk or talk it, chalk it, or whatever.
- [13:33](#) L: Correct. So the coach is adjusting to the player and that player's needs versus this is the way I do things, this is how I do it. You know, and I, and I've seen a little bit of the golf channel or, and it's not just golf but this sort of.
- [13:47](#) V: But that's right up front all the time.
- [13:49](#) L: This sort of verbal just dumping of all these different technical terms and very specific things, you know, launch angle and it's like at some point you're like, just hit the damn ball. It doesn't matter. Right. I mean this is play, you know what I mean? But I don't know that that's me, but.
- [14:05](#) V: Well I mean what's serving? I, I showed you today a picture of the javelin, cause I'm doing a presentation on javelin. I haven't coached javelin since 2004 and look at unity of movement. So if I want, you know, if you brought me in, and you say, Vern, I want you to teach tennis, sir. I could probably BS my way through it for a few minutes, but I would go back to knowns and the kids have all seen a baseball pitcher and I'd show baseball pitcher and then we'd show a football quarterback, and then he'd show a javelin thrower. And then you'd say, okay, now, now let's all, and I'm big now. This is something I've really kind of arrived at that, that really what coaching is, is about creating habits and, and then skill learning. And also what I do as an athletic development coach is about making shapes and being able to change shapes rapidly. So I'm going to be long and tall, then I'm going to be short and compact and then I'm going to be wide, you know, and so, you know, you could do stuff with the tennis serve where you, you hang a ball and they have to, you know, and it's just audit their reach, you know, and they have to swing toward it, you know, and just create, create opportunities for them to be able to, you know, to be able to learn. Like I, I'll take it aside. So it's going to be high school coaches I'm talking to, step one of learning the javelin is just throw, throw anything and then throw anything you can find and then throw it far. And then we'll teach you grip and we'll give you a

javelin. But if you can't throw, you can't throw a javelin. And I was watching today with the serve, the one girl who was struggling with the serve when Richard just had her throw, she couldn't throw very well, you know? So what's the, what's the requisite movement skill, not physical literacy. Now, the second step in physical literacy is the movement skill. That's the prerequisite to a good tennis serve. And the forehand and backhand are striking skills, you know, so can you, can you throw a, I mean the girls don't want to throw a punch, but.

[16:00](#)

L: Well I think one of them did, but yeah.

[16:03](#)

V: But yeah, so that...

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J: Officially, that did not happen just to clarify.

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L: But you look at athlete development models, it's all about these basic movements, skills first, right? I mean, and then moving into sports specific skills. What are your thoughts on, on athlete development models in there?

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V: Well, the, the keyword, you guys are putting bait in me here.

[16:26](#)

L: Hey, we like to have fun here.

[16:27](#)

V: The key word is model. And I haven't seen the model athlete yet. I've gotten a chance to be around to work with some pretty good ones, you know.

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L: And they're all different.

[16:37](#)

V: And they're all different and they've all had, they've all had interesting pathways to get to to the top. And it's, it's definitely not linear and it definitely doesn't follow train to play, train to compete, training, you know, it's just too, that's too cute and too cut and dry. And what we've done is we've tried, and it's a model that's been adopted in virtually every country that I've, that I've consulted with and in the sports, and I ask them, is it working? No, it never worked in Canada. You know, it's, it's, it's a mythology and based on a misunderstanding of what the former Eastern European countries used to do too. Now remember, we don't, I don't want to, to go back to those days. I don't want, I don't have my, I do have a son and daughter, but they're adults now. I don't want my, to give my seven year old to go to a sports school, you know, and learn five sports and then be specialized in swimming if you're a girl at 11 and you know, like that. So, you know, what, what I don't think anybody's really done is going back to some of the growth and development literature that Molina did at Texas back 50, 60 years ago. I mean, there's a lot of great stuff, but it doesn't, he didn't speak with a German accent, you know, sorry, I'm not prejudiced against Germans or Italians. He's Italian, so something like that. But it was, it was sound and we had a great system in this country. That's what people failed to understand. You know what, that system was based on daily physical education in the schools and school based sport, school-based sport, not club

based sport, not pay to play. And the coaches were trained teachers. I was, you know, and, and now it doesn't exist anymore. In fact, the schools don't want to have any, if you could really ask, they don't want to have anything to do with sport. They're willing to give sport up because it's an aggravation for liability reasons and that, and you don't have mandatory PE as a base for qualified coaches. So we had a system, and I think I'm not living in the past, but I think we have to find ways to look at why, why those things were and that were particular to American society and look at, you know, and look at that. Certainly tennis historically was outside the school systems. You know, it was, it was club based, as was swimming, you know, two pretty successful American sports, but track and field, basketball, water polo, those were, you know, those were school-based sports.

[19:01](#)

J: So do you think, I mean we talked about not boxing athletes in, and then we talk about adapting to the athlete, not making the athletes adapted to us or a system. Do you think these LTAD models, which it seems like the intent is to provide safe and healthy recommendations for what the children should do, but do you not think it almost backfires a little bit in, in that it's trying to adapt all kids and everyone to one system, one model. And as you said, there's been no model athlete. And so the, the thing about tennis is, as you know, is a highly complex sport.

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V: It's a skill dominant sport.

[19:38](#)

J: It's a skill dominant sport. The, the reality is is that if you don't, you need a play lot of the, you need to play a lot of the sport. You need to understand the technical, tactical, like most sports, but in the complex nature of our sport, you need to play a lot of it. But you can play other sports alongside it.

[19:52](#)

V: Absolutely. And, and that's what's misunderstood. Look, if you have a youngster, eight, nine years old and they love the game of tennis, well let them play tennis, but encourage them to play some soccer, to play basketball to, you know, to participate in other sports, you're not trying to get them... And then if they, if they keep the interest in tennis, well then nurture the interest in tennis. Okay? But you know, the worst thing that ever happened was the book, the outliers, the 10,000 hours. It's not a 10,000 hour rule. It's a misinterpretation of Ericsson's research. So you know, the parent, the, the, the helicopter parent decided, well I can't, I've listened, I've overheard parents saying they calculated and, and so if Johnny doesn't start at five, he can't be a great tennis player cause he's not going to get 10,000 hours before he's 21 or at golf or whatever it is.

[20:42](#)

J: So like you said, it's not really linear and it's not...

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V: Absolutely.

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J: It's not 100% quantifiable by, by volume.

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L: Well that's where deliberate practice comes in as well as, this was an aggregation of different sports and activities and 10,000 is a, is a mean. And people don't understand that. I think the one thing I would, I would go back to with the athlete development models is that is a lowest common denominator approach.

[21:09](#)

V: Yes. Yes it is. It's good way to express it.

[21:11](#)

L: You're trying to further coach, maybe that doesn't have the expertise, give them a template to be successful, what to look for, what to do. And there may be some value in that, but I think coaching elite athletes or you know, good coaches aren't gonna, aren't, aren't just gonna stick to an athlete development model. They're going to see what they see with their eyes and they're going to go to their philosophy and they're going to see, okay this kid's actually ahead of the curve and in a smart way, in a healthy way, push that player. This one may be behind so we need to do something differently. But that's what I was thinking about these models is you're always developing these for the lowest common denominator, not for the really...

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V: That's a good way to put it.

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L: ...Master expert who has seen hundreds of athletes and trained them.

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J: And when I think about us a governing body and long term athletic development models or longterm athletic development, sort of long term athletic development guidelines, I don't, I remember going back to when I first started teaching. I came out of college and one of the first documents that I saw was something Dr. Paul Lubber has put together and it was the progressive development of a high performance player. But it started from 10 and under through 12s, through 14s and it, but it was based around growth and development principles, which is really important to know, not chronological age. And what he had was was it was technical, tactical, physical, the emotional, the social, the mental and all that. And what it was was really a guideline of skills that need to be trained or can be trained appropriately at the different ages. So you as a coach can look at that and go, ah, am I incorporating this element in my teaching? Because all these are skill sets that I can help my athlete with as opposed to the one size fits all that says, all right, I'm a parent and I look at a piece of information that says you should be doing multi-sport participation. You should be doing this, should be doing that. And it's like, well, a lot of this, does it take into account what the child wants? What does the child want to do? The child...

[22:58](#)

V: It doesn't take into account the most important element that I see and I go back to, I started coaching in 1969 in Santa Barbara and we in, in my, uh, my second year teaching in my gym class, I had ended up the greatest, he's still considered the greatest water polo player of all time, Terry Schroeder. You know, and he played everything, you know, and, and was an age group swimmer, obviously that helps, but he never saw water polo ball. We had Sam

Cunningham who went on to be an all pro running back for the new England Patriots or no, Boston Patriots then, and uh, but he played, he played three sports until his junior year and then just did track and, and, and baseball. I could give you, who else, [inaudible], same small, same Santa Barbara. You know, he started playing volleyball on the beach with his father when he was five. And by the time he was seven, everybody knew that this kid was going to be a great volleyball player. Okay? But one thing that nobody ever points out is he came through a system where he had daily PE and he was exposed to all those other sports in PE. Okay? And, and so that's, that's just as good. That's just as good as multi-sport participation because it, you know, and that, so that's one thing that needs to be pointed out. The second thing is, again, it's the growth and development sport is really, I mean this, the last two days were, we were saying when we were walking over here, that was just a great reminder. You had 14 year old boys and 14 year old girls. Okay. Today was the only day they did stuff together. So it, it made it even more dramatic. But the girls at 14 are so far advanced that the boys generally, they're more coordinated. Now, what about cognitive and emotional and intellectual and mental? See that's the other part we don't take into consideration. I mean the teenage brain and we've all finally figured out that the teenage brain is different. Some of these crazy behaviors, crazy behavior, but now I think some parents are using that for excuse to let their kids run wild and that, but we're not doing anything.

[24:56](#)

L: Yeah, their brain's not developed.

[24:57](#)

V: Yeah. Their brain is not developed. Well, yeah, but still have to fit in within certain parameters. But, but I don't think we've done a good job of taking this into consideration in the athlete development process. And as you said, the holistic part of it. You know, so I mean I, I've made this mistake where I've tried to present way too advanced information to a, like a sophomore in high school because they had the physical qualities and you know, again, it was a failure. You know, after the first three meets, I go, I got gotta pull back and just recognize that, that this young man just didn't have the cognitive ability at this time to process the things that I was trying to have him do. You know? And so you gotta you gotta figure this out, you know, and that's what makes... To me that's what makes what we do really fun. You know? Cause if it was cookie cutter, you know, I'd do something else. I'd work on an assembly line cause that's cookie cutter, you know, or something.

[25:51](#)

L: But that's great coaching because you saw, you read and react and you adjusted versus forcing the athlete to do what you wanted. And then I think coaches make the mistake of thinking that athletes aren't motivated when in fact they're not capable.

[26:05](#)

V: Great point. I need to write that down. Yeah.

[26:08](#)

L: And we all have to fight that battle. And I, and now, I mean I'm a mental coach, but I also coach baseball and some hockey still. And I have to fight that

battle with myself of am I asking too much? And I always go back to John Wooden. If they're not learning, then I'm not coaching. And that's what has to...

[26:24](#)

V: Great book, by the way.

[26:26](#)

L: The best, right? We talked about him earlier on a podcast, but a lot of coaches, I think maybe it's an ego thing, maybe it's assumptions about youth and teens, believe that it's motivation. And when many times, especially when you're dealing with elite athletes, it's not motivation. It's how it's, how it's being presented to. Maybe we're not meeting them where they're at.

[26:44](#)

V: Yeah. It's, I, I hate the sound of this cause it sounds a little bit manipulative, but it's getting to know the athlete to learn what buttons to push, how to relate to them. Some athletes and, and you got to know yourself too. I mean, I, I had the opportunity to work for Bob Knight or for one of the pioneering sports psychologists for a year and he had a, he has and still has an, a lot of his, [inaudible], who had a game this year used, uh, uh, you know, the taste tests and tests of potential interpersonal style. And that was a revelation for me. And I have to tell the athletes that I work with under pressure, I need to get away from you. I, I got walk away and then collect myself before, cause I've, I, you can talk to some of the athletes I coached before that, you know, I'd say the wrong thing at the wrong time. I had to, I had it down really bad, you know, and it, but it was how, as a coach, had to learn my attentional style and style of communication too, you know, and then match that with the athlete. Yeah. So good point.

[27:42](#)

J: That's awesome. So I mean this is great because we're talking a lot about improving our teaching coaching skills essentially. And what that means for the athlete.

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V: It's my passion now. Yeah. It's easy to get them strong. Yeah. It's hard to do that other stuff.

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J: So if we talk about actually impacting the athlete then, how would you incorporate, we have our modeling tennis that generally is warm up, play tennis, fitness. For those that are in academies, then they may come back in the afternoon. Warm up, fitness, cool down. Okay? So you've seen it, you've seen sort of, you know, a little bit of the structure and you've had experience with...

[28:15](#)

V: I've seen one in my community and they're close by, so for 30 years.

[28:18](#)

J: So in terms of structuring it as a tennis coach out there, how would you incorporate athletic development into that programming?

[28:24](#)

V: Okay. First of all, we're going to get rid of two words. Okay? We're going to get rid of strength and conditioning. We're calling it athletic development and we're going to strike the word fitness from everyone's vocabulary. If you want

to, if you want to get kids to hate what you do as a tennis coach or a basketball coach, say we're going to do fitness today. Immediately they're saying, Oh no.

[28:46](#)

L: We're going to run.

[28:47](#)

V: We're going to run, you know. And you run in tennis? Yeah, not very far. And you get, you get a lot of chance to take breaks. Okay, so know the game. So we're going to get rid of that. I want to strike the word warm up and cool down. We're, we're going, instead of warm up, we're going to call it preparation. So it's physical and mental preparation for the work to follow. So I'm gonna, the warm up is progressive, the warm up, there I went. Preparation is progressive.

[29:10](#)

L: It's hard to strike.

[29:12](#)

V: It's hard to strike 70 years of... It's progressive and the warmup matches up there, I'm going to use warmup right now, It's just simple, matches up with what the objective of the tennis lesson is that particular day. So if it's a lot of serving or a lot of baseline work, then I'm going to make the warmup session do that. Then the other thing that I'm going to do is I'm not going to separate athletic development from tennis skill development. So for example, we talked about this yesterday, you were doing a drill and I thought right away, bingo, I would have had one person was doing the drill, two people were waiting. I would have had the third person in line doing what we call sway drill, it's just, it's hard to explain verbally, but it would be just a drill. So they would be doing a, a physical preparation movement that would lead into the skill. Same thing with serving. I would do something possibly with a medicine ball and they would do right handed and left handed before they went in and served right handed. Not many, maybe like three to four throws with a med ball, something like that. And so basically what you're doing, and this follows good principles of learning, you're also interleaving. You're going a similar movement to a specific movement, a similar movement to a specific movement, and then in regard to, well you're saying you still haven't talked about fitness. No, we don't. The cumulative nature of the work and using properly developed interval work, preferably different kinds of short rest runs and movement skills and things like that, we're going to accumulatively over time, raise their fitness levels appropriate for the game that they have to play. Okay. And recognize that and if you're doing multiple sessions in a day, then again, you can't forget that the cumulative nature of the work that you're going to get that adaptive process and what you're going to do when you run distance is you take away explosiveness. You make the player slower, and then you hear, well the girls need to control their weight. Great. Then what we're going to do is we're going to get, we're going to do one more strength training session a week than the boys. That's my rule of thumb. And probably that's going to be a mini circuit orientation, you know, that's, that burns high calories and that kind of stuff. Cause slow aerobic work, whether it's done on the bike, running, whatever is not fat, doesn't burn fat, go to a gym. And look at all the fat people on Stairmasters and that, you know, and you had, uh, and so you're killing your female athlete, you're killing them. You know, when, when you need to design a

more specific strength training program and, and you're going to improve their self image tremendously. That's one of the biggest things, the biggest things that I've seen with, with the female athlete at the 13, 14, 15 year old, you know, all of a sudden they start, they start, you know, doing all the med ball work, they start doing appropriate strength training. They handle their body weight. They go, geez, you know, I look better. The boys love that. You know, they, you can't get them away from the mirror, you know? I mean, you have to be careful of that, you know? So that's, anyway, that's, I don't know, does that answer, does that answer the question or not?

[32:09](#)

J: Absolutely. And then there's one more, one more piece to that was the cool down.

[32:12](#)

V: Oh yeah.

[32:13](#)

L: We don't use that word.

[32:14](#)

V: Yeah. Well like, like today a really great session ended and the kids are, the kids aren't going to go home and it was maybe eight minutes of static stretching, which was not inappropriate. Okay? But I would have preferred to do something first of all had it, had that static stretching individualized cause you saw various kids lacked range of motion in variant positions. So you say, okay Vern, you do, you have to do, we have 10 movements, say you do one, three and five. Okay. But I would have rather have gotten them up and done leg swings, some skipping, something that resets the nervous system. Particularly if you're coming back this afternoon for another session cause you don't, I don't want them, and foam rolling, I don't want to see foam rolling done before workout. Oh that's a, that has a calming effect. I might do foam rolling as my, one of my reset things, you know? So when they leave there, they feel perky, they feel refreshed. Not like somebody just beat the daylights out of them, you know? So, and that should be, that should be pretty individual, if you can. You know, you're in an individual sport and even in a team sport I try to individualize that, that period. So...

[33:22](#)

L: Coaches will say sometimes, many coaches will say, well we do the the one mile, the two mile run to build their confidence.

[33:30](#)

V: Yeah, in what?

[33:30](#)

L: That they can last.

[33:31](#)

V: Well then I'd rather put them in pressure situations on the court and play or play games like we played today. Where they're, where you make constraints or you put them in pressure situations and they all of a sudden become comfortable with being uncomfortable. First of all, there's nothing in tennis or various intermittent sprint sports that lasts. I mean, a long point in tennis is what? Maybe 30 seconds. I mean, if you look at the average point hell, it's six

seconds, you know, so you know, and what you've got to do and that's, you know, not your job. That's all our job is to teach him how to focus, to, to narrow their focus and broaden their focus, narrow their focus and broaden their focus. And we, when you go on a 20 minute run and, and particularly they put ear buds on, it's just, they're just, they're tuning out. We don't want them to tune out. We want them to tune in. So design competitive game activities and drills that make them focus and refocus our work on the mental qualities that they need to have. You're down two points. You've got, you know, this is, and this is a situation you play that, and then how you react. You're done. Practice is done today, you know, and you say, well, we're, we're losing. No, you're not. They're learning, you know, they're learning. So you know, if they miss, I mean, I wouldn't do that all the time, but sometimes that can be a lesson, you know, too.

[34:44](#)

L: Love it. Love it. You're speaking to me right now cause I've been arguing about creating stress and games and challenging people in practice and focusing more on that than just hitting of the ball. Cause I think we train mindless.

[34:58](#)

V: Mindless, not mindful.

[34:59](#)

L: Yes.

[35:00](#)

V: But that's where we all have to work together. And I think that's that, I mean that's what I'm impressed with all the pieces here. Okay. And I'm not being critical. I saw some great things. I saw some okay things. And I'll write up a report obviously, but the, the okay stuff is I don't see enough everybody working together. Okay. Everybody, you know, marching together in the same lane, you know, now it's instead of silos, it's stay out of my lane, you know, or something like that. No, no. There is no lanes, you know, and we've, we've gotta, we've got to be professionals and be willing to do what we have to do obviously legally and ethically to, to help make the athlete better. You know? And a lot of that is getting to know what our strengths and weaknesses are. You know, so that I, I'm going to use, you know, use you to compliment me, you use me to compliment you, but vice versa. And, and those of you for the listeners that are maybe working in, you know, in the private sector and clubs and there's resource people in your community that you can use, there's resource people in your clubs. You know, if you really, I've seen this now with the swim teams that I work with that there we've, we've encouraged them to go out and seek out various professionals that would be willing even to volunteer, you know, as to help with the coaches. Not to interact with the players or the athletes, but to help with the coaches, do little workshops and things like that to help upgrade your, your knowledge in various areas.

[36:23](#)

L: Don't you think Vern, that, cause I've been through a lot of this as a, as a coach educator in my profession that when you bring someone in like that, like you're talking about, let's say I bring in a psychiatrist and they speak with the coaches, isn't that challenging the coaches to figure out how to transfer that knowledge. And that's a wonderful thing because that's making that coach

better. Because I can come in and tell the coaches what to do from a mental side and say, you should do this, you should do that. And then maybe they do it. Maybe they don't, but they don't own that versus, hey okay, I'm presented this knowledge, what am I going to do with it? Right. And again, that I think you need to do both. Obviously in our role, we need to, there are certain things that need to happen and I need to make sure it happens and in the other ways the coaches need to be presented with, with certain problems and how do you resolve it and then you look at it from all the different areas or domains. How do we figure this out and work together to do it?

[37:16](#)

V: Yeah, no question about that. And I mean like that's kind of the role I play with the swim clubs that I consult with. So I, I'll be like a little bit of a clearing house and say I might send them a presentation from Gain, [inaudible] presentation or, or say look at Greg Gatz at UNC. Len was up, was up, up at chapel Hill and somehow they communicated and he just had Len come over. He's, Greg gives a really does a great job with the Olympic sports strength and conditioning and he let Len just come over and talk to his staff, you know, about recognizing, you know, what, you know, that kind of stuff. While I, one of the things that I need to do, I think with one of the swim clubs I work with is have somebody in their community and I've got to find the right person to come and talk to him about shoulder injuries and that kind of stuff, you know, so they can ask the right questions and educate the parents to ask the right questions when Johnny or Susie sees a doctor or in tennis it could be elbow injuries or something like that. You know, so it, look, what am I saying over and over and over. You know, I was trained as a teacher. I had great teachers. I did, I had great teachers in, particularly a couple of teachers in high school and in college and great mentors and all of them were great teachers. You know, and being a son of an immigrant or a first generation American, there's a high value placed on, you know, on education and learning, you know? And so, you know, that's how you're going to be better. So you're going to be a better coach. If you do what you've always done, you get what you always got. I know. That's why I flunked ninth grade English, but yeah, it, that's true.

[38:42](#)

J: Yeah. And I know we're running short on time here, but that, that's, that's incredible advice and some really good knowledge and wisdom there that, that I think we can all connect with. I mean, I think coaches listen to this, players listen to this, parents listen to this, which is a big part of who our audience are. I think there's a lot of great stuff in there for you to be able to take out of this. And so as we wrap up today's episode, Vern, have you got some, some final advice for our listeners out there?

[39:05](#)

V: Yeah, it just in terms of particularly the parents look looking to find somebody to work with your son or daughter in terms of strength training, physical preparation and that. Call the staff here and ask them about the characteristics of what you need to look for. There are many, many people at gyms and many personal trainers have a lot of certifications, but they need to understand growth and development and they need to understand that you're preparing to play tennis. You're not preparing to play football, you know, and that, and I

don't want to end on a negative note, but I see too much of this now. A mom has a personal trainer and she really likes him and then the son is doing that. Well, getting mom ready to go grocery shopping or work in the yard is a little different than getting their son to be able to play tennis, you know? And that, so, and I think you guys here at USTA, you have the, uh, you have the resources to just call and, and you can talk to Johnny or you can talk to any, anybody here and, and they'll give you some ideas or, or vet the people, you know, that's, that's something that I, it's, I'm kind of on a crusade for that.

[40:16](#)

J: It's awesome. And we're obviously, we'll be more than happy to connect people together when they, when they ask us questions and we've had parents reach out, coaches, reach out about connecting with a mental performance coach, or a strength and conditioning, or athlete development coach.

[40:31](#)

V: Well, yeah, that's what Gain, I mean, if nothing else, I'm not trying to promote the Gain community. We could, we could recommend people in various parts of the world that would be really, you know, and connect it and then come back and you know, and do that. And that's not, there's no charge for that. And that's just, that's just being good, being good professionals. Right, right.

[40:51](#)

J: Yeah. Well, awesome. Well, Vern, thanks so much for joining us. We really appreciate and we've had a great time having you in a couple of days and look forward to, to getting your thoughts on the whole approach here. So.

[41:01](#)

V: Well, thank you. Appreciate it.

[41:03](#)

J: So, for more information, we're going to put in the show notes as, as Vern mentioned there, you can check out [thegainnetwork.com](http://thegainnetwork.com) to check out, uh, that network that's coming up June 16th through 20th for coaches interested. Uh, we also have, uh, we'll put up Vern's social media, he's very active on Twitter, Instagram, and uh, LinkedIn, Facebook, and he's also got a podcast, the Gaincast, so be sure to check that out too, with some great information on there on, on athletic development. So, Dr. Lauer.

[41:33](#)

L: Coach Johnny, thank you.

[41:34](#)

J: Thank you very much. Until next time, coach Mick. Thank you.

[41:38](#)

M: Thanks guys.

[41:39](#)

J: Alrighty.