

# How the Stories We Tell Ourselves Affects our Confidence wit...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

playing, match, win, players, started, juniors, forehand, jimmy, confidence, world, point, thought, feeling, tournament, bit, mental, borg, story, court, tennis

## SPEAKERS

Jimmy Arias, Larry Lauer, Johnny Parks

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-  **Johnny Parks** 00:05  
Welcome to Compete like a Champion. You're here at Dr. Larry Lauer mental skill specialists with USTA Player Development and Coach Johnny Parks with IMG Academy. today. We got a great episode for you. We've got a special guest actually sitting here right next to me. It is Jimmy Arias. Jimmy, welcome to the podcast.
-  **Jimmy Arias** 00:23  
Thanks. Great to be here.
-  **Johnny Parks** 00:25  
All right. Well, Jimmy, we've we've been working together now for 10 months, I started middle of September. And the thing that struck me was I was excited to start working with you, because I've been able to watch some of your matches, and there's a ton of it on YouTube. And the thing I was fascinated with you and your in you and your game was was that forehand, because I can really resonate with the fact that my forehand was a big heavy shot. And when I started diving deeper into, you know, really I didn't think back to many other pros at the time you were playing that had a forehand like that. Now that I know from the stories that you've told me and your when you moved here to work with

inequality areas, you're essentially modernize the forehand.



### Jimmy Arias 01:10

Yeah, not me is manifested in me in some ways, yes. But my father is the one who actually sort of changed the way you hit the ball. And in a sense in that I was seven years old. I went to take a lesson I've been playing, I started five. But I was just I saw video myself. I was just punting the ball around and my dad but I couldn't keep it in play. My dad thought this kid has some talent. Let's get him a lesson where the teaching process, I went to take the lesson. My dad's an electrical engineer didn't know anything about tennis, really. And they said shake hands with a racket, which was about a continental leash, you know, maybe Eastern forehand grip, the ball comes I want you to stand sideways, take the racket straight back, point, the follow through, it's your it's your target at the finish. So I'm doing that I can't hit it that hard with that sort of technique. But you know, I'm hitting it in. And I come off the court Dad, what do you think my dad who's from Spain and has an accent goes? That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard in my life. And I go, What do you mean, he goes, how can you swing full speed and stop that means you're slowing down when you're hitting. So he started sort of trying to think about the best way to get racket head speed because he thought whoever swinging faster is going to win. So he wanted me to relax my arm. And he wanted momentum. So he wanted the racket head pointed up on the backswing. And he wanted shoulder turn. So I had to take the racket back with my left hand that was very important to him. And the right hand is just going along for the ride is like holding on lightly with my right hand. And because I'm small, I think I had a semi Western grip just because everything was up here. So I think it was just natural to have a semi Western grip, he didn't really bother so much with the grips. And so I turned my shoulders when you're taking it back with your left arm and the racket has pointed up. And he said I want you to just let it go. The follow through just finishes as far as it can finish, you say your arms connected, you know, to your to your body, it's gonna stay there and you just let it go. And someday you're going to learn to control it. That was basically his philosophy on that. So I'm playing when I was 11 or 12. I actually made the finals of a money tournament in Schenectady where I beat to, they were college guys, but they had ATP points. And I was I'm still small when I was 11 or 12. And I was you know two foot 460 pounds and I could sort of overpower people because my technique was different was was the way you should play. Unfortunately, two things happen. One, Nick Valterri saw me I came here and, and he saw that forehand and he said, that's the voluntary forehand and started teaching everybody that forehand and other players obviously started seeing it and recognize wait that's a better way and so I wasn't able to dominate for very long because everyone else started



Johnny Parks 03:58

Doing it.



Jimmy Arias 03:58

Doing it.



Johnny Parks 03:59

Well imagine it was causing the people you were playing against the wasn't used to it was now getting a ball jumping up a bit more jumping a bit higher, and therefore putting more balls in play. The men started to play more physical, very physical, yeah, because that would speed up the rally the tempo



Jimmy Arias 04:17

And look, it was easy to at the beginning because everyone had kind of a grips and when the balls up around shoulder height and you have that grip, it is very two or three and there's no way that the balls gonna get away from it basically is what would happen and they countered that actually, players in that day they were still difficult because they took the ball very early, and the courts were lower faster. So they were coming in and sort of not letting it get too high, the very talented player so it's still they still found a way to make it not not completely easy for me but but obviously everyone recognized. This is a good way to hit a forehand. What was funny is when I Nick was the first coach that everyone that saw me from from seven years old to 13 years old, even though I was Winning the nationals and the juniors and all that sort of stuff. They would all say, your arms gonna fall off, you can't swing like that all the time, they would say, you'll never swing that fast under pressure. If you're really right now you're not feeling pressure, but when you're feeling pressure, that's not gonna work. Or he's too little, he's not gonna be able to play Anyway, those were sort of the three negatives that everyone heap on me all the time, which was kind of interesting, because that that kind of stuff feeds my personality. I would, I would say, just wait, see, yeah, I'm wait and see bring it off kind of thing.



Larry Lauer 05:35

I want to ask about your dad, because you said, he said, just just swing it that way. And, and you'll eventually it'll start going in. But how did his mentality his lessons help you to deal with that? Those negative those negative things that coaches were saying about you?



Jimmy Arias 05:53

Well, he was also saying negative things about me. So it's sort of a bit of a different thing. My dad was, I guess he knew that I'm motivated by proving you wrong. So then, sort of on me a little bit, I think that's my personality. And I think that's one thing with the mental side of the game, I think it's different for everyone. I think one of the problems we've done to our society, not just tennis players, but to our society over the last 15-20 years, is that we're so focused on their self esteem, and we're telling them, they're great, and you're doing well, you're so good. I think that I think that creates fear. Because they know deep down inside, they're not great that the people that we're telling they're great, they're not great, they can see the results. And they can see that, but they think we think they're great. Their parents or their coaches think they're great, because we're telling them they're great. And they don't want to, to go out there and put it on the line because maybe we'll figure out they're not great. They already know they're not great. And maybe we're gonna figure out they're not great. My dad went with the complete opposite mental thing. He basically told me every day how much I stink. And literally when I would miss a shot in a tournament in the juniors, he would if I looked at him, he would hold his nose and point his finger at me saying I stink and, and the other thing that he did that really drove me crazy. I had a little brother that was seven years younger than me. And he would tell me every day, he's so much better than you.



Larry Lauer 07:31

Oh, wow.



Jimmy Arias 07:32

He's so much better than you. And I'd be like, Damn, he's number three in Buffalo. I was number one in the nation. It would drive me as my brain was exploding, but it was also me trying to, to prove them wrong. that motivated me. So I it's hard for me, in this sense instance, because it's sort of like, I'm a bit of the opposite of what you guys mental conditioning people are probably told to, to teach. I'm more of a and I don't do this with the kids. By the way. I'm not don't doing what my dad did. But I do think there's a place for it. But certain people, I bet you Johnny would be better off if I told him he stinks. he'd run through a wall to



Larry Lauer 08:17

He's shocked about that.



Jimmy Arias 08:18

Prove me wrong! That's good.



Johnny Parks 08:19

I definitely had a personality that if someone got on me, it made me step it up. Yes, for sure. is interesting. I talked to Larry about this. My brother is a brilliant tennis player, brilliant junior, representing Great Britain. And you know, he got a bit ill and his like late teenagers, and he came out play college tennis with me in New Mexico. But his talent level was through the roof. And he was he was good. But he was very much different personality to me. I remember at college, we had one coach that was quiet. Would talk to you, like reason with you, like, on a calm level. And then we had another coach who was his twin brother, who I responded really well to him, because he would get on my back and say, What are you doing? Step it up like hustle. And you know, not that he needed to be told to hustle, but you get the point. Yeah. And I rose to that. As I got older, I learned that I could take motivation from both types of ways that coaches would help try and help me out either quieter a bit of a pat on the back or, you know, kick up the butt. But it's interesting, like my brother was the opposite. He could not deal with somebody shouting at him. You know, get your stuff together, whereas I absolutely thrive off that.



Jimmy Arias 09:34

Yeah. Anyway. So that's what I what I loved about college, I coached college tennis for one year, and it was my favorite. I love being on the court during the matches because you have to figure out what helps your guy stay calm, and it's different for everybody a little bit. And I was luckily very good at that like I could I could read it pretty quickly and I and by the end of this season, all six kids that were playing on the team, if they were struggling, even though I wasn't on their court, they would tell the coach on their court, I need Jimmy, go get Jimmy. And I just had a way of knowing some people, it was just common, you know, everything's good. We're just keeping them relaxed. Some kids, I had to get on a little bit. And one kid in particular, I actually had to call every point, I have to tell him where to serve, I have to, like, if I did that, it took the pressure off him because then it was my fault, he would yell at me if it didn't work, which was fine. But that was the only way he could perform at his best is if it was sort of on me, not on him. And it was interesting sort of finding what each kid needed to click.



Larry Lauer 10:47

Yeah, so definitely got to get to know the individual. And now going back to what you

were saying, Jimmy at such a good point about the self esteem movement that happened in this country. And trying to counteract that with let's talk about reality. What's actually happening because kids aren't dumb. They know the pecking order. They know what's happening in these matches. So let's be real. Man, let's also let's build you up. Let's look at your strengths. And let's look at what it's going to take for you to achieve the goals that you want to be successful. But really interesting, you know, because there are athletes who have that chip on their shoulder, they want to prove everybody wrong, they get motivated by that. They don't take it the other way of, you know, everybody's hard on me. And this is too difficult and right. It's a tough read sometimes. And would you say it's harder to find those kids today? With the changes we see in society?

J

Jimmy Arias 11:50

Yeah, of course, I don't think I don't think my dad's technique. Unless you started at really young and I again, I think my dad sort of had pretty good insight with with me. And I think one of the things he wanted from me was, for me never to be satisfied. So a story that I never forget, because of the emotion that I had at that moment. So my first good event, my first on the tour, I made a quarter and a semi of sort of that, the 250s. Now they were 75,000s when I play but the 250 in the ATP tour. I've made a quarter and a semi at that level. But I'd never done really well at 1000 or 500 level. And I'd made the semies have a bigger tournament and I'm playing a guy named Jose Luis Clerc who at the time was ranked four in the world and he was actually on a 15 match win streak or something he had been playing really well coming into the into the tournament. And we had a ball carrying match, which I won six, four in the third and the serving for the match. It was incredibly tight game for me and I got through it. And I felt so good about myself making my first final. It's in a bigger tournament and I call and I call my dad, like Dad, Dad, I just be Clerc, can you believe it? And he goes, you should beat Clerc, who do you play now? And I go, Lando? He goes, don't even call me if you don't beat Lando.

L

Larry Lauer 13:19

Wow.

J

Jimmy Arias 13:20

Yeah. And I went from like, on cloud nine to holy crap I got I got a match tomorrow. I gotta fly. I get ready. It was weird. He just he had that sort of, don't get satisfied. He didn't want me too high or too low. He would tell me that also, sometimes.



Johnny Parks 13:36

Well I think in that situation, it's a good, I think it can be a good strategy. Because how many times do you and you'll see this because you with all your commentating work? How many times do you see a player who's made say, a quarters or a semies, or a final for the first time after they win that match to put them in the next round where they haven't been before? Talk about Oh, it's amazing. This was my dream to get to this round, or I never thought I could get to this round. And in that statement, there's so many players that get satisfied with the fact that they've got to that round that they haven't that they forget that they could now keep going even further. And it's almost whenever I see that I put my head down so I'm almost like that's a death sentence that you've just given your own death sentence there because you've just told the whole world how satisfied you are with the round that you just got to and so it's no surprise in the next rounds. Yeah, they may perform decently but they don't have that. That that those that those guts in that inner drive or that? I guess they know satisfaction by going I am not satisfied.



Jimmy Arias 14:41

Yeah, my biggest regret of my career probably is US Open in the year I made semis before the tournament started I said I saw the draw and I said if I if I don't make semis this whole I had a great summer leading up and I said I don't make at least semis. My whole summer was a waste in my mind. And I made the semis with two five set wins I'd be okay. Nice German and around a 16. And yeah, like no in the quarter. So two five set wins. And I have that, that exact feeling of, I'm sad. I'm happy I made semis. And I was playing Yvonne Lendl on the semies. And that was in the day when Lendl still hadn't won a major and he could choke. And he started joking against me, and I sort of didn't take advantage of that I normally would have. But I didn't because I was so sort of, I don't know, I wasn't there. I wasn't in my normal mind. It's hard to explain. But I didn't have that edge. Yeah, of wanting to win. I'd already like well, I almost went on the court going, why am I I've already won this totally



Johnny Parks 15:50

Well you took the pressure off. So I think when you take the pressure off you almost your awareness in your eyes shut down to when not your eyes, but your brain shuts down as well to that deeper inner focus that connects you to what it is you're trying to achieve. The minute you tell yourself, I'm satisfied. You relieve all pressure. And you go out there being okay to lose. Yeah, whereas



Jimmy Arias 16:13

Exactly.



Johnny Parks 16:13

I don't think you've probably there's many times you've gone out on court being okay to lose that. But you've figured out a narrative in your head that is okay with losing, which I would imagine is very weird if you when you come off the court. And you know, you just said it's one of the biggest regrets your career. You come off the court and you go, that's just not who I am.



Jimmy Arias 16:32

Yeah, that was that was Yeah, like I said, I'm still thinking about it was 800 years ago, I think they've showed that match in black and white. But anyway



Larry Lauer 16:41

Black and white. I'm sure I can find it in color somewhere. Well, it's an interesting concept. Because you I think we're also



Jimmy Arias 16:51

You see I have a question for you, since you're the mental condition guy, because this is something that that. So at the beginning



Larry Lauer 16:59

You're turning the podcast around on me here.



Jimmy Arias 17:00

Sorry, at the beginning of the beginning of my career, because I think because I won so much in the juniors and I was accustomed to winning, I would go into a match. And within a point or two of starting the match, I always thought like, I'd watch the guy playing think he's really good, I'm in trouble. But as soon as the match started, my thought process was no chance this guy can beat me. It might be close, but in the end result is I'm going to win. And that filled me with sort of just calm, you know, there'd be nervous moments throughout the match, whatever. But I knew that the end result was that I'm going to win.



How do you get there? Because I lost it. So at the end, I started once I lost enough matches, and it wasn't there. And I snowballed in the other direction. And I'd actually by the end that was like, I'm gonna find a way to not win. I mean, I got to be somewhat negative. And I didn't have any tools that allowed me to get to that first stage, it was just that I won a lot. So I think it just sort of built on itself. Is there a way you can get players to sort of, I don't know, have that feeling of calm because the end result is going to be what I want, or D is that? Yeah, I guess



Larry Lauer 18:19

I don't think it's impossible, Jimmy but it is challenging. And you got to understand your confidence comes from different places, the greatest source of confidence is winning, as you experienced. And that gives you that belief. But if you can find confidence in other things, maybe you at least have the commitment to do the little things in those pressure moments. And that allow you to get through those moments, you know, for example, focusing on your strengths and believing that you have strengths that will overcome other players strengths, focus on how your strengths can expose their strengths or their weaknesses. Getting down to that level or you know, just really trying to change the story in your head because what you're really talking about Jimmy is you have a story in your head. That story, that narrative becomes a self fulfilling prophecy because the brain, what the brain does is it filters out the information that would tell you otherwise. So when you are winning the evidence that would tell you that you might lose, you're filtering that out like that, you know, I'm gonna find a way. But when you started, the story changed and it got more negative. The brain started filtering out the information that would tell you you were going to win and you start focusing on the reasons you were going to lose. We have flipped that at times, but that's by getting really process focused and focused on the things we control and your strengths. And just believing that while I'm going to I'm going to take my punches I'm going to take blows to the jaw I'm going to get back up I'm gonna find a way but it's it really is challenging what you're asking to do there is hard but you have to first be aware of that. That story in your head is a self fulfilling prophecy.



Jimmy Arias 20:03

Yeah, it's interesting you say this during you had to guess I remember, I won the first 10 tie breaks in the final set that I played on tour.



Larry Lauer 20:11

That's amazing.



Jimmy Arias 20:13

And I'm playing a guy from Spain in a tournament and I hold serve to go up six, five, in the final set. And I'm sitting on the chair, I swear, this sounds so ridiculous. But he's serving five, six and a third everyone else in the worlds. That match is still like 50-50, basically. And I remember thinking, he doesn't know if I'm looking at him, is it and we're changing when I go? He look, he thinks he still has a chance. The match is over. I win six in the third. Like, he might as well shake hands. I swear to you, I was that confident. match was over just by me holding to go up six, five and third. And because I was calm, and I broke. And it didn't go to a tie break. Because it was it was literally I looked at him and I'm see that he's nervous. And they're like, Yeah, dude, don't worry, it's over. That was my thought process. It was ridiculous. But you're right, I have the story in my head was I'd won. And then I won.



Johnny Parks 21:12

Yeah, well, the the interesting thing that Jimmy is, you're combining that that confidence in mentality that you, you, you said comes from winning a lot in the juniors and having come through, the one thing that you paired that with was a hell of a lot of hard work. But you're a physical player, and you work to the bone, I mentioned to see your perspective on how those two intersect. Because Larry and I have often talked about how the physical can help with the mental the mental health with the physical, it's this cycle process that they can help each other in the world we're in now where you've got, you know, even here, you got PD, right? We've got mental skills or mental conditioning, your strength conditioning, got the tennis, and it can be very hard to just kind of work in those, sorry, can be actually very easy to just work in their silos, whereas we know that everything is so interconnected. And it you know, in the days that you were playing, there wasn't all these specialists. Right? So how did you navigate how those two met like how what was your approach and understanding that the physical can help your mental and vice versa?



Jimmy Arias 22:13

Well, for me, because I also had a physical game, it was physical for my opponent, when they were playing me. So one of the things that I did hang my hat on, when I was telling you, I'd find a way to win, it wasn't always because I thought I'm the best player. A lot of times in my head, I was thinking, this guy's physically isn't going to be able to keep to keep up to keep going, he's going to break down as I stay out here and, and force him to play these sort of tough, faster moving rallies. And what that accomplished is, it gave me again, that sort of calm, and that sort of thought process of it's okay that maybe it's not going so well right now. But if eventually, physically, he's going to break down even if he didn't, it gave me that sort of feeling like, everything's gonna be okay, cuz he cannot, he can't hold up, especially when it was hot. I loved it when when I was in super hot weather,

because I felt like, that's when I felt like I'm, I'm going to last and they're not. And that was the confidence.



Johnny Parks 23:15

So you gained a lot of confidence just in your physical abilities you knew you could do and what your opponent couldn't.



Jimmy Arias 23:20

Yes.



Johnny Parks 23:21

Yeah. So that's, that's Larry, what you just said there is gathering confidence from different areas. And obviously, sounds like, you know, a big part of Jimmy's game was playing physical and and that helped him win. But I would say in practice, would you say that a lot of that confidence was built because of the way that you train versus what you know about others in the way that they train.



Jimmy Arias 23:44

A little bit of a combination, because you know, that I didn't train that hard. Off court. I did mostly everything on the court. So I played a ton of sets and a ton of matches in practice, but I also liked to do a bunch of two on one stuff, or I'm the one and I'd get to juniors and I, you know, I had heard when I was younger that Borg would go like, two on one for 45 minutes, you know, Moon blah, blah, blah, and his heart rate, but only get to 26 or some ridiculous thing because Borg was this weird mythical person in to all the people he played against, you know, which is just before my era, so that sort of the late 70s guys would talk about Borg. Like, he's not even human kind of feeling. And so I sort of tried to adopt that. Obviously, I couldn't go full speed for five minutes format. I mean, I but I would try. I would do that sort of stuff. I can't believe he did it for 45 minutes. Like they tell me I would I would assume that it was traveling much slower their way. You know, I mean, like his Right. No, right. Yeah. Oh, wow. Yeah. And I don't know that any of that's true with Borg but that's what people told me that the guys that he was playing against would tell me. I mean, I have one story where about Borg where nevermind it's ridiculous I'm not even going to tell you the story. He's playing a match against the guy this guy telling me and and the guys beating Borg and it's in Monte Carlo and all of a sudden he gets a strange feeling. And he he looks over and Borg staring at his whole body froze and he couldn't play anymore. That was the story. So I you know, bork had special powers, I guess.



Larry Lauer 25:45

So we figure out Borg was a Jedi, he was using mental tricks.



Jimmy Arias 25:49

I mean, that's the story didn't I did not happen to me. So and I don't think it would have been the guy told me that.



Larry Lauer 25:56

I love that. Well, it would JP is picking up on is is finding ways to believe in yourself and other ways. You know, you'd like your fitness, the work that you do. Obviously, Agassi leaned on that a lot in his career, and later part of his career as well. That's a great example as well. You know, is it's a challenging, challenging thing to change. I think it starts with helping players make the connection and being aware of it, like, do you see how the way your thinking is creating your result, A is leading the B to C, there's no, you're not inevitably flawed, you're still the same person or better. But it's how you're thinking and being able to break through that story. But it's a challenge. And it takes today, we can use video, we can use analytics, we can do whatever. But you still have to



Jimmy Arias 26:51

I love what you guys are saying actually, because I'm thinking about it for the first time because the story the one of the other stories I always told myself was and it worked. The one the match, I remember right off the top, my head is Jim Courier. So I played, I loved playing very good players up and coming players, but in their first semi final or final, because I just felt like you know, I've been here a million times, they're going to be sort of tied to try to finish if they have the opportunity to finish because it's a new experience a new round for them. And so that was the story I would tell myself before the match. And I almost always won that match in that situation. Including courier The only time I beat courier was in that situation. He beat me the rest of the times once he once he got used to it. And that's so that story, you're right, that story you tells kind of it, it happens. But you find a way to believe the story. That's the thing. I believe that story because it had happened enough times against good players playing them in their first semi final.



Larry Lauer 28:02

it creates an expectation, right? And something that I can do. And you know, we hear from players all the time. Gosh, playing other Americans is so hard, completely different story

than the one you just told, like, I don't want to have to play another American so hard. Like, why? Like, you know, these people, you know them in and out, you practice with them. So you have that in inside information. You know, and that should give you an edge. You know, obviously they know you too. But if you believe in your ability to perform then

 Jimmy Arias 28:34

Well, isn't it? It's just that you want to be the man for America to lose to another guy. That's American. And so that just adds another layer of

 Larry Lauer 28:46

Absolutely

 Jimmy Arias 28:46

Because I I felt that as well, a little bit I didn't, not so much Americans because when I played everybody was American. I was kind of I mean, the top 10 there. I was five in the world and three in America.

 Larry Lauer 29:00

Wow. So you would get a little desensitized to that whole American thing. What

 Jimmy Arias 29:06

I what where I got tight is when I start playing someone younger than me because early in my career, I didn't lose to anybody younger than me ever. Obviously, at some point that started changing. And I didn't like that feeling playing a guy younger than me and, and losing. So I'd be everyone's younger than me and

 Larry Lauer 29:28

It's every everybody now.

 Jimmy Arias 29:32

Yeah.



Larry Lauer 29:34

So Jimmy, from your perspective, the best players in the world. We've been talking a lot about confidence and the story in your head. I'm sure it relates somehow but the best players in the world we have today. What mental edge do they have on the rest of the field? How to how do they separate and if you're a young player, how do you figure that out?



Jimmy Arias 29:54

Well, I think one of them is the physical side that the very top players I've never seen them sort of falter from a physical standpoint. So they have that edge going into the match knowing that even if they're not playing well, they can break you down physically, they're not going to break down and they're going to be able to break you down. So I think obviously, they have a big edge there, the other edge is at the very top players always have to me is that they always are going to get off to a quick start. Because their opponents a little tight, most of the time, they're playing a name this, watch them on TV. And so they, they're already kind of better than you. And now you're also giving him a little bit of a spot lead is often is not. And I think it just goes back to what we were saying earlier, they're accustomed to winning, they know that the end result, the end result is they're going to win. And when you have that mentality, you don't worry during the the, the ups and downs that happened during a match, because the end result is already in your mind secured. And, and so there can be anxious moments within but so long as you know, it's all gonna be good. Because I got this, I have the end result that I'm gonna have. So I guess to me, that's, that's the biggest edge. And it's strange a lot of I think today's, Nadal is a little different. Nadal to me seems like he, he does have he does think everybody's good. I think some of the top players actually think these guys no good. I'm so much better and so much above him. And I don't know, when you have that. That swagger, that arrogance, that sort of inner confidence. It again, what you're thinking is what happens. And so I think that's, that's the edge that they have. And what's interesting to me, because we're on here at IMG and I'm seeing sort of a lot of some of our juniors that have now gotten to 400 600 and in the world, and some of the other pros that sort of transition type pros that come through. And right now we have a bunch of college kids playing UTR tournaments, and their games are almost all the everybody's the same level. Now. When I played 200, the world was bad, unless I just had that cocky attitude the top players had, but I felt like the 200 guy that were like, beaten with my shoe, if I will, I mean, it was they were bad. But today, it feels like 150 in the world to 20,000 in the world, there's a whole bunch that are at that level. And it's gonna come down to sort of your mind, and which person believes. And that's, to me, that's the key of how do you how do you get that? How do you get that belief is that one of the things I sort of telling you, I've always thought I'd win. But when I first started playing on tour, obviously I start losing you as you

move up each level, you're losing matches all the time. And I got confidence from one of my competitors, Matt Wilander was the same age as me, same month, we both went up the rankings exactly like the same. And we both got the 70 we're both in the 70s at the exact same time, 17 years old. And we play each other second round of, of Italian Open of Rome. And obviously that's that's the first time we play against each other. And it's, this is the match like this is who's going to be number one. And you know in the world at some point where we're thinking, I'm sure when we're playing each other. And I end up four-three up in the third breakpoint I hit a great I still remember the point I hit an inside out forehand came in, he hit a slice pass, I hit a decent volley because my volley was not my strength, but it wasn't a bad volley. And he's running and sliding with a backhand grip. And so I've sort of just take a little step back for what I'm sure is a lob, and he flicks a perfect little angle, you know, like slice angle cross coordinate and one in 10 kind of shot hit it perfect. It's a winner. He holds breaks hold beats me six, four in the third, makes semis of the French I mean, semis of Rome wins the Italian. Two weeks later. Yeah, wins the French. And then because of that, the next term I played was the one I was telling you about where I beat Clerc and lost to Lendl in the finals. It was 100% because math won the French, and it sort of made me say wait a minute, I should have been them were the same age. I should be beating these guys. And I told him it was completely I don't think it would have happened as quickly for me. Had there not been Matt Wilander.



Larry Lauer 34:50

That's interesting.



Johnny Parks 34:51

Well, we know we've seen that. We've seen that through the years too, right? I mean, was it the group of a I mean it's so much that group motivation. You, we saw back in the day even like here, right? Wait, I remember this photo Martin Blackman when it was used to show us this photo, and we're a PD of him, Jim Courier, Andre and Wheaton.



Jimmy Arias 35:14

I think those are the four.



Johnny Parks 35:15

Yeah. And this this group of players that were pushing each other and coming up together, and then obviously a couple separated out. But we're seeing it now with some younger Americans with Reilly Opelka, Tommy Paul, Taylor Fritz, you know, and some of the others

around the age who are the best players in college. So who knows what happens if that when they come out and give it a go. But we've got all these, you know, these kind of groups of players, you look at the Italians right now, as well, these groups of players that are measuring up against themselves. And using that as motivation, the example users gave us a classic example of how it works is how we could work on a college team. Right? You could be playing practice, you could be the number four guy in your freshman year. But on a given day, you go and take out the number one guy on the team, and then all of a sudden you realize, Hey, I could actually be that number one guy, not when I'm a senior, but why not this year? Why not? You know, why not? So it's interesting what that does, Larry, and I guess there's a psychology behind that. But that's a really interesting thing. We were talking about setting the right environment, as coaches, and being in the right environment, creating those little clusters that provide that extra little bit of guests of internal inspiration and motivation is, is part of that can be part of the formula.

J

Jimmy Arias 36:30

Actually, I think it's a huge part. I think it's why I think it's actually why. Okay, so the Swedes that when Matt Willander, their nice drum year, there was a group of four or five, um, that traveled together had a team, the rising health team. And they all they all did great. They all pushed each other to great things. One of the things that voluntary did was we had best players and a cluster together, you talked about that Agassi group, that was his best group ever. But my group, we had probably five or six guys that made it into the top 50, top 30 in the world. For the same reason we all start once somebody breaks through the other guy's now wait a minute, I'm as good as him. or pretty much as good as him, I can do it too. And it all comes back to that belief, it all comes back to the belief. So you got to find a way to believe that another story that I remember was another time when I had a breakthrough. So I'm ranked like 400 in the world, or 300 in the world or something, but I'm only 15 or 16. And I go to a challenger in Japan. And Nick sends this college player with me that's just starting try to plan the tour. But he's really there to be my chaperone. I'm the star and he's, he's trying to play but he's, you know, he's done his four years of college, he's never gonna be a great player. And he's there to take care of me. He's traveling to take care of me. So we go to the first tournament, I lose second round of the challenger. He wins the tournament. And and the Japanese press kept interviewing me about him. You have no idea when you're like 15 and 16 and as cocky as I was at that particular time, like that was killing me. Talking about Ron Hightower, my you know, the guy that I'm almost saying, like, he's my chaperone. What do you tell me about it? You know, I'm talking about it's kind of so he wins the tournament. I don't say that. I'm obviously smart enough to know that say that, but he wins the tournament. And after he wins, I go Tower, man, congratulations, well done. But I'm winning next week. Because he won the tournament, and I couldn't take it. And I won the next. The next challenge. And



actually, I beat him in the semis.



Larry Lauer 38:49

Oh, wow.



Jimmy Arias 38:49

Yeah. I beat him in the semis and went six in the third.



Larry Lauer 38:53

Oh, wow. Some pressure there.



Jimmy Arias 38:55

Oh, no, no, you have no idea. idea. We were he was he would have killed it was bleeding to win that match. And the match point was actually also hilarious because I that in the tie break I served out of my mind, I didn't have a great serve, but I hit two aces and the tie break and now insert match point six, five, and he's going in is ready like he's overdoing his ready position and how pumped he is making noises. And I I go, alright, I'm gonna I'm gonna mess with them a little bit. So I'd hit big. Like, do this like I'm gonna, like kill serve, and I go and serve like 16 miles an hour. And he hits it so hard in front that he hit the ground. But anyway, that's,



Larry Lauer 39:43

What a story. That's great. Unfortunately, JP, we're running out of time.



Johnny Parks 39:49

We are, I think it'd be great Jimmy if we could do a part two at some point because, yeah, sure, you know, appreciate the you know, I'm really fascinated to to go a little bit deeper, now you're doing a lot of commentating work, you're doing a lot of commentating work for tennis channel, and you're recently watching a ton of pro tennis, and you've seen this evolution through the years, it'd be great to take a deeper dive into your perspectives of the evolution of the game from all perspectives. And you know, what you're seeing. Now,



Jimmy Arias 40:20

Actually, it should be a quick little thing because I, I sort of, I liked the game better when I played from the standpoint of everybody had obvious weakness and strengths. And so your goal when you're playing a match was to hide your weakness and, and get to your opponent's weakness. So I felt like there was way more thinking, when I played. Today's guys, the weaknesses are not so obvious, the weaknesses, maybe they'll still go forward, they'll miss a few under pressure, but, but it's not like, you know, it, obviously, you can't hit 434 hands in a row kind of thing. So it's become even more of, to me sort of a physical, grinding, mental battle, every match, which makes those other two things, the physical and the mental side. Even more important. I mean, when I that's why I said one 200 in the world, he was bad. It was like, I didn't have to have physical or mental edge. He was just a bad guy. But it was so easy to get to his weakness and no way for him to get to mother type of thing. And that has changed. So to me, the game has gotten it's gotten, you have to be a beast on every side.



Johnny Parks 41:34

Well it's an interesting paradox, because those demands are so much sounds like so much greater. But yeah, the society factors that we talked about with protecting our players to Mark's point, well, the demand of the sports gotten greater, which means the ability to be more resilient and be tougher on court, in those pressure filled moments is greater. But you can't I don't think you can develop resiliency, and that that toughness, if you're always being protected from those challenges as you're becoming more resilient and more tough. So it's an interesting paradox that the demands of the sport as they've gotten greater society's values have switched. And there's a balance with everything we know. But I think it's just interesting. And that'd be a good one to again, maybe go a little bit deeper into next time, Larry, what do you think?



Larry Lauer 42:25

I believe it would be I think that's an awesome insight, and would love to get deeper into that.



Jimmy Arias 42:31

Actually, I know, I keep talking when I'm supposed to, we're supposed to end this thing.



Johnny Parks 42:34

A sign of a great commentator, you know.



Larry Lauer 42:36

Yes. So much great material.



Jimmy Arias 42:38

No because it's sort of into, I love this kind of stuff. And I know one of the things that sort of made me different than most kids. And the reason I did well is, and I use this example with my kids here, sometimes, because everyone's always trying to get away from the pressure or from things that are difficult, they're trying to escape it. And that was something that I naturally didn't have an eye, the example I use is there was a kid that I lost when I first moved to Florida twice, he did things to make me angry one he would he would cheat. And then after he cheated, do it dance, "Ole!" and dance in a circle, shaking his butt drove me at my ears were gonna explode when he did that. And the other thing he did was, you know, playing a match against miss four on the third and the final one of the junior tournaments. And he says, Hey, points, and I look up at him. And he, he makes a motion as if, you know, you're very short. And then I'm gonna step on you like, you know, and it worked. And I lost six, four in the third from that point on. And then he ended up coming to the Academy. And I asked the coaches, I want to play him as often as I can, because he gets to my head, he makes me angry, and I can't control it. And I want to learn how to deal with that. I want to be a great player, and I need to be able to deal with that. So I just want, like, if you want to be a great player, you got to do the things that you are uncomfortable. You're hard that are difficult, and everyone's trying to find a way out of those things now,



Larry Lauer 44:04

Spot on. Spot on, Jimmy. Absolutely. And if we can get players to do that, then they will develop the confidence necessary to take the next step. But if you are avoiding? Probably not. I don't think you can.



Jimmy Arias 44:20

Yeah, I agree.



Johnny Parks 44:22

Awesome. Well, we're definitely gonna have to do a part two Jimmy. I feel like we've only just scratched the surface.



Larry Lauer 44:27

There's so many stories to hear, but I love them all. They're great. And they are great stories. Thank you, Jimmy.



Johnny Parks 44:35

Absolutely. Well, Jimmy, thanks so much for joining us. We appreciate it. And I am going to get you on again sometime soon. Maybe after? Yeah, I know you're doing some commentating stuff next week and through the grand grasscourt series, but um, we'll get you on again. Sounds great. Thanks, guys. Well, that's a wrap for this week's episode of Compete like a Champion, that's a great great discussion there with Jimmy Arias former top five in the world. Director of Tennis here at IMG and you'll be able to hear Jimmy on the Tennis Channel. He's going to be doing some commentating work and you'll be able to get a lot more insights if you're watching the tennis live there with with Jimmy so until next week, Dr. Larry and I are checking out.