

# COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

*Coach Dave Lay's Favorite: A Winning Attitude*

## WINNING ATTITUDE

It has been my observation that 90% of us beat ourselves — by too much confidence, or too little; by blaming the other person, or by blaming ourselves; by too much pessimism when things look bad, and too much optimism when things look good.

The one trait of all great winners is an absence of the blame-worthy sense. They do not pout or pass the buck when others are at fault, and they do not rage when they are at fault. They may be beaten, but they never beat themselves . . .

I am convinced that it is temperament, more than talent or brains that determines whether we are to win or lose. The difference between a champion and an "also ran" may be trifling in terms of ability; it may be vast in terms of SPIRIT.

*Anonymous*

*Coach Dave Lay is the Colorado State University Offensive Line Coach*

RAM FOOTBALL

# COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

## IF

*IF* you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;

*IF* you can trust yourself when all men doubt you  
But make allowance for their doubting too;

*IF* you can wait and not be tired by waiting  
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies;

*OR* being hated, don't give way to hating.  
And yet don't look too good, or talk too wise;

*IF* you can dream — and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think — and not make thoughts your aim;

*IF* you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same;

*IF* you can bear to hear the truths you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools

*OR* watch the things you gave your life to, broken  
And stoop and build them up with worn-out tools;

*IF* you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue  
Or walk with Kings — nor lose the common touch

*IF* neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you  
If all men count with you — but none too much

*IF* you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run

*YOURS* is the Earth and everything that's in it  
And — which is more — you'll be a Man, my son.

— Rudyard Kipling

WHAT YOU DO  
BETWEEN POINTS

# THE

# 10 SECOND

CAN MAKE OR  
BREAK YOUR GAME.

# CURE

How mentally tough are you? It's very difficult to determine a player's mental toughness by simply observing how he or she performs during points. The time between points is much more revealing in terms of emotional control, concentration and general mental toughness.

During this year's U.S. Open, whether you're watching in person or on television, pay specific attention to the activity on the court between the points. What are the players doing? Is there a difference between leader and loser? Do the top men utilize between-point time the same as the leading women? Where do you fit in compared to the pros?

I've spent over 10 years gathering information—from personal interviews, videotape and biofeedback instruments such as heart monitors—and analyzing what the world's top players do between points.

From my studies, I discovered that top competitors typically completed four rather distinct patterns of activity between points. Players with competitive problems, however, invariably failed to complete one or more of these activities. For training purposes, I divided the patterns of activity into four separate stages and numbered them according to when they occurred between points.

In Stage 1, the definable pattern of activity was a series of distinctly positive responses occurring immediately after the point, which seemed to restimulate the flow of positive emotion. Stage 2 was a pattern of activity that appeared to enhance the body's efforts to recover and relax from the stress of the previous point. Stage 3 was a mental pattern of activity, which helped players continue to play intelligent tennis and to think clearly under pressure. Stage 4, which occurred just prior to the start of the

next point, was a pattern of activity that assisted the player's efforts to become focused and optimally ready to start the next point.

Top competitors learned these patterns through hundreds of hours of competition over numerous years. Studying the commonalities of the world's best competitors can help us develop a fundamental understanding of the mental and physical skills necessary for competitive success. Teaching these four stages enables players to learn mental toughness and competitive skills more directly and quickly. In detail, here's how the stages work:

## S T A G E 1

### THE POSITIVE PHYSICAL RESPONSE

**Purpose:** To facilitate the continuous flow of positive emotion or reduce the chance that anger, disappointment or any other disruptive emotional response might interfere with playing the next point.

**When stage starts:** As soon as the point ends.

**Length of stage:** 3-5 seconds.

**What you should do physically:** Make a quick, decisive move with your body the *instant* the point ends. For example, if you won the point you might make a quick pumping action with your arm and closed fist. If your opponent made a great shot, you might clap using your hand and racket. If you lost the point, and this is the most important time, make a quick, decisive move away from the mistake as if to say with your body, "No problem." Immediately transfer your racket to the nondominant hand



### STAGE 1

In Stage 1, Doug Flach quickly channels his emotion from the just-concluded point into one or two decisive movements.

BY JIM LOEHR, Ed. D.

facilitate blood flow and relaxation of the dominant hand. Hold it gently at the balance point between the handle and the head of the racket with the head slightly tilted up projecting a strong, confident image. Never carry your racket by the handle with the head pointed downward, because it portrays a weak image.

Both arms should be fully extended and hang freely at your sides to aid relaxation. Shoulders should be back, head up (chin level with the ground), eyes forward and down, projecting high energy; this produces a strong, highly competitive image.

**What you should do mentally:**

You don't need to say anything, but if you do, follow these guidelines. If you lost the point due to a mistake, say, "No problem, or Let it go." If you lost the point due to your opponent's great shot, say, "Nice shot." This takes the pressure off you. If you won the point, say, "Yes!" or "Come on!"

**S T A G E 2**

**THE RELAXATION RESPONSE**

**Purpose:** To allow your body to recover from the physical and emotional stress of the previous point and return your arousal level to an optimal range.

**When stage starts:** 3-5 seconds after the point ends.

**Length of stage:** 6-15 seconds.

**What you should do physically:** Continue your high-energy walk until you reach the baseline. Walk across the baseline and then slow down. Move back and forth across the back of the court. You can shake your hands out, stretch, spin the racket in your hand, bounce the ball on the



strings, or towel off at the back of the court. Breathe as deeply and slowly as possible. Your eyes should be on the strings or on the ground. The important thing here is to keep your feet moving. Don't stand still waiting for the next point to start. Under high stress conditions, blood flow will pool in the feet and legs and slow you down if you stand still. Be certain not to walk right up to the baseline and begin the point. Always walk across the baseline. The more stressful the previous point or the more important the next point, the more time you should take in this stage.

**What you should do mentally:** Think only relaxing, calming thoughts such as "Settle down, it's OK," or "Relax."

**STAGE 2**

In Stage 2, he keeps his feet moving during recovery.

**S T A G E 3**

**THE PREPARATION RESPONSE**

**Purpose:** To ensure you know the score and have thought about what you intend to do before the point starts.

**When stage starts:** As soon as you move toward the baseline to serve, or toward the return of serve position.

**Length of stage:** 3-5 seconds.

**What you should do physically:** After achieving recovery in Stage 2, move toward your serve or return position. If you're serving, stop about a foot or two from the baseline and pause. Verbalize the score out loud, looking directly at your opponent. Project the strongest, most confident image possible. Notice Doug Flach in Figure 3. His image is strong and aggressive. His racket rests in his



nondominant hand tilted upward and he is blowing on his hand. This is the look and feel you want in this stage. The same is true on the service return. The receiver should project as powerful an image as possible, looking directly at the opponent as if to say, "I am confident I will win this point."

**What you should do mentally:** During this critical stage, consciously decide what you're going to do on this point. In a sense, you will be programming the computer. Considering the situation and the score, ask yourself, "What should I do? Should I stay back, serve and volley, attack the second serve, play a long point, hit out, or return crosscourt?" Consciously plot out what you intend to do on this point, either with words (e.g., "Get to net") or pictures (visualization).

**STAGE 3**

In Stage 3, the image he projects is strong, aggressive and confident.

# S T A G E 4

## THE AUTOMATIC RITUAL RESPONSE

**Purpose:** To achieve the highest state of mental and physical readiness prior to the start of the point. This sequence of automatic physical movements deepens concentration, balances intensity with appropriate muscle relaxation, and produces an instinctive, automatic form of play.

**When stage starts:** As soon as the player steps up to the baseline to serve or return of serve position.

**Length of stage:** 5-8 seconds.

**What you should do physically:** For the server, two things have proven important—bouncing the ball a minimum of two to three times prior to the serve (as Doug is doing in Figure 4A) and pausing just after the last bounce (Figure 4B). This pause seems to keep players from rushing their service motion under pressure. On the return, the ritual usually in-



**STAGE 4A**

In Stage 4, Doug uses a sequence of rituals to deepen concentration and balance intensity.



**STAGE 4B**

Flach's final ritual before serving is a momentary pause after his last bounce. His instincts now take over.

volves jumping up and down or swaying back and forth. Some players spin the racket; others blow on their hands. But your eyes should be fixed on the ball on the other side. The return ritual ends with a split-step, moving forward just prior to the server's contact with the ball.

**What you should do mentally:** Concentrate on your serve when serving, your return when returning. At this point, no thought should be given to technique, grips or strategy. Most players benefit from a quick rehearsal of the serve or return that includes a clear image of where they want the ball to go. No self-talk is recommended during this stage.

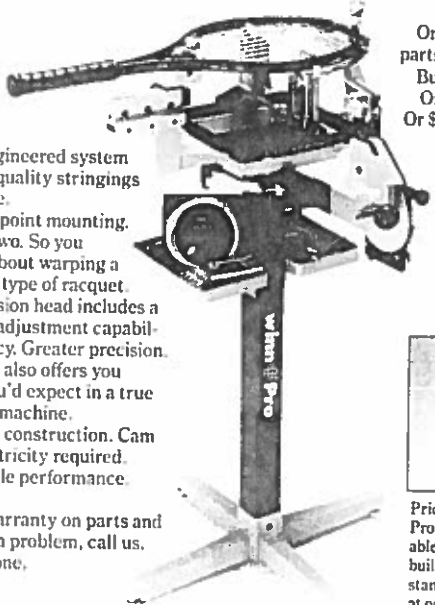
It's important to note that if you miss the first serve, the same ritual sequence should be followed for the second serve. The time between first and second serves should typically last 5-7 seconds. Take a minimum of 16-18 seconds between points, not including second serves.

## POINTERS TO REMEMBER

- Following this four-stage routine will initially feel unnatural, forced, just like a new grip or stroke adjustment. With practice, however, this routine will begin to feel very natural.
- An excellent way to practice the sequence is to rehearse the stages on court without an opponent on the other side.
- Study videotapes of the top players going through the stages and videotape yourself in competition.
- Make your performance between points more important than your performance during points. Always strive for a perfect performance.
- For the pros at an event like the U.S. Open, controlling their activity between points can be the extra edge in controlling a long match. It can make all the difference in your game too. □

*Jim Loehr, Ed.D., is completing a video on this training concept to be released later this year.*

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# How to get MENTALLY TOUGH

BY JIM LOEHR, Ed.D.,  
with Cindy Hahn

What is mental toughness? In the final part of this series, we examine how strength and resiliency help make a sound tennis mind.

**W**e began this series last month in a quest for that elusive weapon called mental toughness by working on emotional flexibility and responsiveness—two qualities that help you adapt and adjust under the pressures of a match.

Now, let's look at the final two components of mental toughness—emotional strength and resiliency. Remember that the mind and emotions are similar to the body's muscles. The qualities that make a muscle healthy and tough are the same qualities that make an athlete's *mind* tough.

## THE STRONG COMPETITOR

**A** strong muscle has the capacity to generate—and resist—significant force. Similarly, a player with emotional strength can generate and resist emotional force during a match. He resists force by not appearing overwhelmed or intimidated by the presence, reputation or appearance of his opponent. He generates his own emotional force by looking strong and confident, by protesting horrible line calls, by pumping his fist after making a great shot.

# STRENGTH

Bjorn Borg was a master at resisting his opponent's emotional force. He virtually had to see a grenade in the hand of his opponent before he began feeling pressure from him, which is why

the Swede.

But Borg rarely generated any outward signs of his own emotional force. Jimmy Connors is the best at that: His pumping and grinding and line-arguing



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN DYKES

# MENTAL TOUGHNESS

are sometimes excessive, but the emotional force he generates is what makes him so tough to play against. But many players, from club level to the pros, need to become stronger emotionally. They are easily intimidated by their opponents' force and not good at generating their own emotional force.

## Test your strength

To determine if you need to improve your strength, answer the following questions with the number corresponding to the most appropriate reply.

- 5-Almost every time
- 4-Most of the time
- 3-About half the time
- 2-Once in a while
- 1-Almost never

1. I'm shy about pumping my fists or showing much positive emotion.
2. I rarely look my opponent in the eye, even when he's all the way across the net.
3. I call lines softly and uncertainly.
4. I rarely protest if I think my opponent is giving me bad calls.

## Scoring key

- 0-5: Excellent emotional strength.
- 6-10: Good strength; still room to improve.
- 11-15: You show signs of strength. You could win more matches if you improve here.
- 16-20: You show considerable lack of strength. You have significant room to improve.

## Improving your strength

To strengthen a muscle, you lift weights, working the muscle just beyond what it can handle comfortably. If you don't lift enough weight, the muscle doesn't get stronger. If you lift too much, the muscle can become sore or injured.

To become stronger emotionally, the same concept applies. The "weight" in this instance, however, is a match crisis—break point against you, for example, or playing a "pusher"

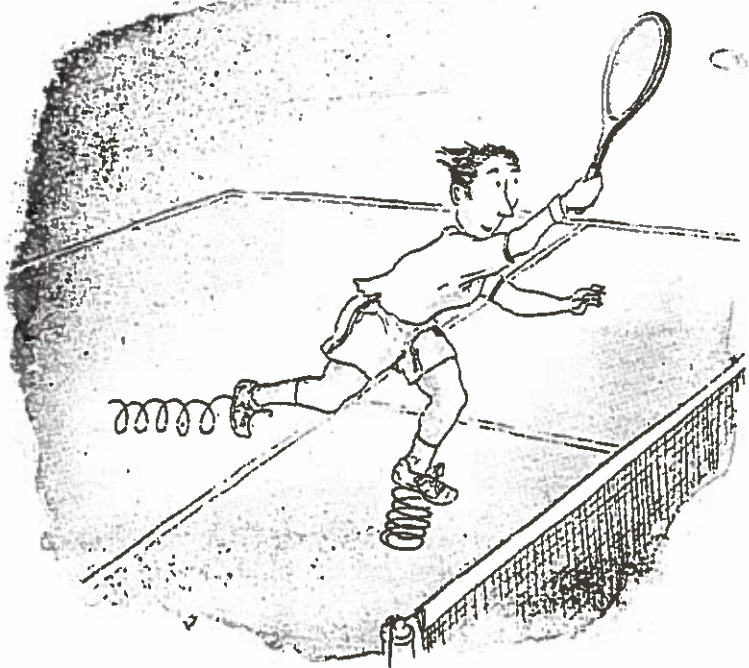
who doesn't give you any pace. The crisis (weight) also can be the emotional force of an opponent, which you must resist: A player who is challenging you, intimidating you or somehow creating emotional stress—pain—for you.

First, you must not avoid such crises. Just as a muscle won't get strong if it is not stressed regularly, your emotional strength won't improve if you don't place yourself under emotional stress periodically.

If, say, there is someone who always is challenging your line calls, and you lose it mentally whenever you play against him,

Now that you've placed yourself in a crisis situation, work on generating emotional force and resisting that of your opponent. It's difficult to control your emotions, but your emotions take cues from your thoughts and actions—both of which you can control.

First, let's work on thoughts. If your opponent is intimidating you by, say, challenging line calls, don't think, "What did I do to deserve this kind of treatment?" That's taking it personally—he's already getting to you. Instead, think: "This guy has a real problem, but it's not mine. I



# RESILIENCY

don't avoid him. Ask him to play a practice set with you. Treat it as an emotional workout, from which you'll emerge stronger.

But be careful of too much stress: Don't play him on a central court with dozens of people looking on. Too much emotional stress has the same impact as lifting too much weight does on the muscle: It will cause you a lot of pain, and you'll take a long time to recover from it.

just have to worry about my game."

You also can generate emotional force with your thoughts. Don't think: "I hate it when he does this." Instead, think of the crisis as an opportunity: "C'mon, let's go. I'm gonna win this point and show him he can't get to me." Now you're thinking about your actions, which you can control, rather than about his actions, which you can't control.

Strong positive emotions result from strong positive thoughts. Research has produced tons of evidence proving that if you think negatively, your hormones and nervous system respond in a negative way. The result is nervousness, fear and tight muscles. But if you view a crisis positively, your nervous system responds in a positive manner, keeping you loose while giving you energy, fight and determination.

Your emotions follow your actions, too. To generate emotional force with your actions, acquire a strong presence on court: Walk tall, with your head up and shoulders back, call lines firmly and avoid whining about mistakes.

To resist force through your actions, take a cue from Borg: Outwardly he always looked loose, calm and collected, even under the most extreme pressure. That helped him resist the force of the most intimidating players he faced.

### THE RESILIENT PLAYER

**O**ne good measure of an athlete's fitness is how fast his muscles recover after a workout. Can he come back the next day for more, or are his muscles sore for days?

Emotional resiliency in tennis is similar. After a resilient player double-faults, he comes back with an ace. A player who's lacking in resiliency, though, will blow the next three or four points after his double fault before he recovers his prior state of mind and level of play. In short, he carries excess emotional baggage into the next point. Resilient players leave it behind.

### Test your resiliency

Answer these questions using the scale from the facing page.

1. My errors come in bunches.
2. I struggle with my temper.
3. Once I start feeling negative, it's downhill from there.
4. When someone gives me a bad call, I stay upset for at least the next game.

### Scoring key

- 0-5: Great emotional resiliency.
- 6-10: Good emotional resiliency.
- 11-15: Some lack of resiliency.
- 16-20: Considerable lack of resiliency.

### Improving your resiliency

**W**ork on both your thoughts and your actions to improve your resiliency. For the mental side, find a couple of key phrases to say to yourself after you make a mistake. I suggest "Let it go," or "No problem; I'll get the next one." Remember: Problems are opportunities to practice and improve mentally.

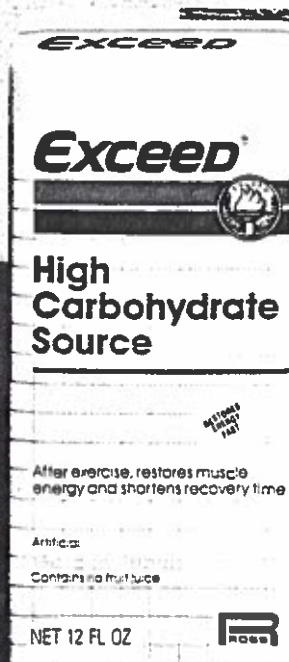
Practice positive actions after mistakes, too. After an error, turn quickly away from the net, leaving your mistake behind you. Don't droop and whine and complain—research confirms that a negative reaction has a negative impact on your play. Instead, use Borg or Chris Evert as your model and act poised and controlled in the face of mistakes. 🎾

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