

Tennis Values

Tennis is about building networks with other players of a similar standard. This enables you to work together with a common goal of improving your game and bring more variety to your game. It is important for a tennis coach to understand the values of tennis to each particular player as they will have different goals and objectives. The true value of competition is in striving to do your best, working on improving your game and reaching your long term objectives. It is also an opportunity to meet new friends and to test your skills. From an ethical perspective it is important that players have respect for each other as we all want to play in a happy and stable environment. Any form of intimidation, bullying, cheating or gamesmanship should not be tolerated.

Tennis should be played in the right spirit where you do not feel intimidated by your opponent in a singles match or your partner in a doubles match. A “winning at all costs” attitude ignores the development of the player, while an “athlete first, winning second” philosophy keeps a balanced view of participation, fair play, competition and justice in all players. Tennis is also about enjoying yourself whether you win or lose, focusing on putting maximum effort into each match or practice session and most of all getting plenty of exercise. Tennis can be quite a frustrating sport as you can do everything right and still come out the loser on any given day. It is important after a loss to put it to rest and focus on your next match as mental strength and hard work will win in the end.

Getting into the Zone

One of the most important aspects for preventing players getting nervous when playing matches is to get them to be in the zone. All too often in a competitive situation we have a tense disposition that makes us freeze on court and lose matches. In the zone is a sense of detachment where you play one point at a time and you are in the moment. This perfect state requires the right attitude and dedication. The zone is an experience where players prepare mentally before they step onto the court. They see themselves hitting winners, keeping errors to a minimum and serving well. They believe in themselves and their ability and use positive affirmations such as 'I can do this' or 'I will fight for every point'.

Once you step onto the court you stay in the zone by taking your time, keeping on your toes, following rituals such as exhaling when you connect with the ball and visualising the winner that you want to hit. It is also important not to work yourself into frenzy when you make an error as you will then be anxious the next time you have to play a similar shot. You do not change your mind and do not doubt your decisions. You stick with it, trust it, and go with it. You do not see your opponent as a threat but as a challenge that can be overcome using the skills that have been taught to you. You learn to focus on the process rather than the outcome as you cannot guarantee the result.

If you find that you are losing your focus in matches it is important to push yourself to the limit and put any distractions to the back of your mind. There is plenty of time for that after your game. The more you practice getting into the zone the easier it becomes.

Patrick McGrath