

Mental Preparation for a Tough Tennis Match

When you know you're going to play a tough opponent, and you know that it's going to be a tough match both physically and mentally, you can follow extra mental routines that will help you get ready.

Of course, even if you're just playing a "normal" tennis match, you should spend some time mentally preparing for the match.

Here's what you can do:

1. Remind yourself of the qualities you have.

A simple thought to start this process is: "Here's what I am good at: ..." Go through the physical, mental, technical and tactical parts of the game and look for areas where you're good.

This is not the time to be critical and harsh with yourself. This is the time to build your confidence, so just give yourself some extra points for having extra stamina or great ability to pick up low balls, being able to get an extra ball back, having good reactions at the net or anything else. These are just examples, of course.

2. Focus on playing good tennis regardless of how your opponent plays, and remember how your typical game looks.

It often happens that the opponent can force their type of game and you simply forget your preferred way of playing tennis. You just react instead of trying to force your own game.

Do a brief overview of how you want the majority of points to be played: long points; keeping the opponent behind the baseline; keeping the ball on their weaker side; using lots of topspin, serve and volleying once per service game; etc.

3. If you know your opponent, determine their weaknesses and your game plan.

This is the smaller part of your game, because it might take you out of your zone and preferred game play. Still, find your opponent's weak points (weak backhand, doesn't move well forward and backward, has poor volleys, etc.) and decide how you're going to exploit them (force with my forehand, drop shots and lobs, etc.).

The key is to **visualize** these plays and memorize them so that they happen automatically in the match when the situation is right.

This is what you should do before each match, possibly a day before as well as an hour or so before the match.

But what if **you know you're going to be in a tough match** where only small differences could determine the winner?

Here are some extra things to keep in mind:

a) Never give up.

There are many situations in a match where it might look like you're going to lose. Your opponent may get to a better start, or you might lose your serve at a critical point of the set, or you may fall behind in the tie-break. If that happens, remind yourself of the commitment to never give up and keep fighting for every point.

b) Keep pressure on your opponent no matter what.

Be very careful not to allow yourself any **letdowns** no matter how far ahead you are. If the opponent is "down," keep pushing them "down" and don't let them "get up." You will let go after the handshake.

c) Be ready for changes of momentum or losing your lead.

A tough opponent will not just let go when you get ahead. It's very realistic that at some point you may **lose that lead** and your opponent may get in the lead. Remind yourself that this is all part of a very tough match and that you'll just keep fighting for every point no matter what happened in the past.

d) Prepare yourself for bad line calls or any other gamesmanship attempts.

Sometimes even professional tennis players seem very naive to me. They expect everyone to be 100 percent

honest and fair, and to never attempt any gamesmanship. That's not what happens in reality.

Some people will try to cheat you; they will not be honest and they will try to throw you off by playing all sorts of mind games with you. If you don't expect that, you'll keep thinking that this shouldn't happen and that the opponent shouldn't behave like that or that it's not fair. You'll lose focus and lose the match.

On the other hand, if you are ready and know that gamesmanship attempts might happen, then you'll just deal with them instead of losing focus while thinking why they shouldn't have happened.

Prepare yourself now for the worst-case scenario and visualize how you're going to handle it.

The more tough matches you play, the more experienced and less naive you'll be, and you'll almost automatically be prepared for all the tough situations and opponents you're going to meet in your tennis adventures.