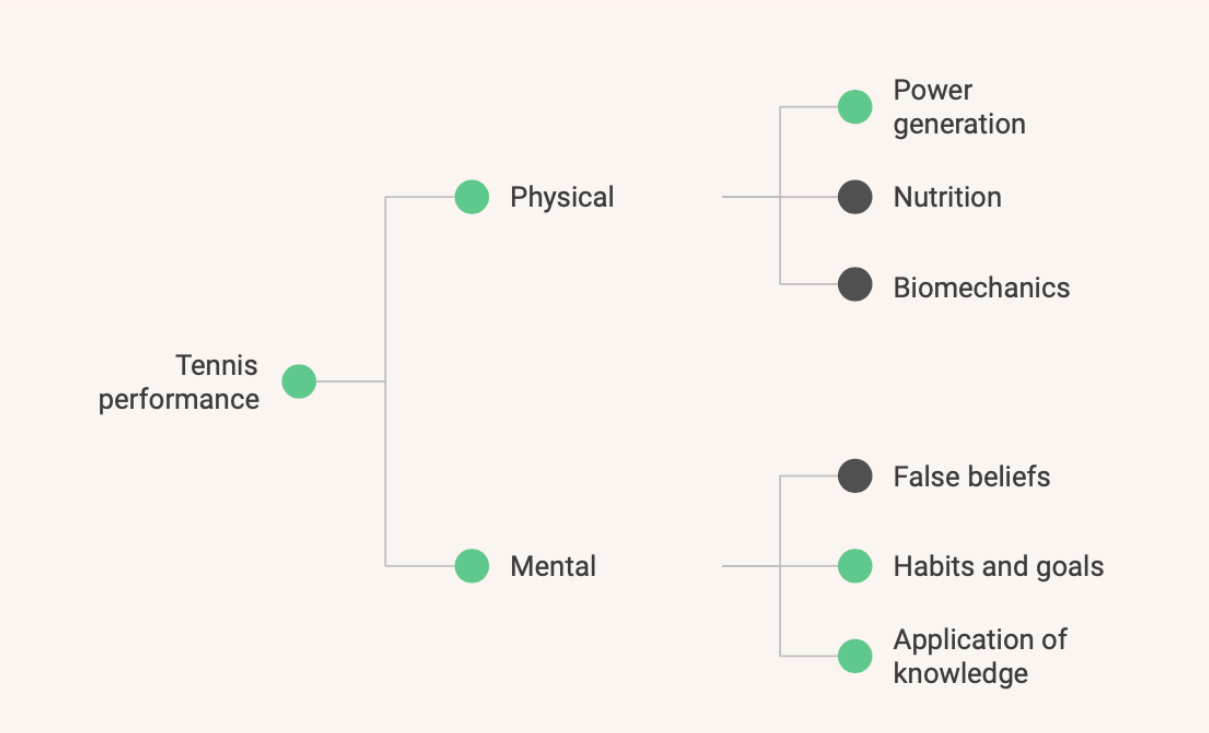


CW/C

Break Point 🤯

How to bullet-proof your mind for the decisive points



A step-by-step guide outlining my most useful tips and tricks for keeping your cool during the big points, on the biggest stage you play on. In this guide, you will learn my story, how to apply psychological techniques in order to stop you from spiralling, and how to apply these methods in the big moments, when all hope seems lost. I'm in the business of creating champions. So, let's do it 🦊

Why listen to me?

I know how it feels; I've been there. Break point down, match point down, and your mind is racing. You're doubting yourself, you're hung up on that point that happened half an hour ago that you're blaming this eventuality on. You're caught in a loop of...

"If only I hit I made that smash"
"I swear that shot was in"
"Why did I not hit to the backhand; I'm so stupid"
"I'm not good enough"
"I can't win now, it's over"

All of these quotes have gone through my head at one time or another, even as a Personal Trainer and a Tennis Coach who knows better. If you're in this category too, then keep reading.

Anyone who's played Tennis with me prior to the age of 19 knows how fiery I get; how frustrated, angry, and how I absolutely lose my sh*t sometimes when things aren't going my way. Many a broken racket, many a silent trip home. One time I tomahawked my racket at a metal dome that was covering the court and broke it in half. It would have been beautiful if I was playing MW2, but I wasn't on rust, I was in a U16 tournament in Bournemouth. Yep, I had some demons to face.

Unsurprisingly, this combination of racket abuse and COD references did not help me win any matches. Whenever I lost control of my mind, I lost control of my game. The writing was on the wall.

It was something I struggled with for a very long time. It's something that you see even the most seasoned competitors and players struggle with. They are dealing with unimaginable pressure, the world critiquing their every move, and the critics living rent-free in their minds. Often, however, they are their worst critics, and their perceptions and emotions cost them those break points.

But in a world of McEnroe's, how can you become a Federer? How can you turn up and fight in the big points, on the back foot, when everything is going against you?

Now, I don't play at Federer's level. I'm sure you would have heard of me by now if I did. However, this is something I have mastered in my own life. I've gone from the fiery teenager to an adult who's in tight control of their emotions and thoughts, and who can pull it back if my mind starts to spiral.

It's taken a lot of time, and a lot of effort, but it can honestly be distilled into a few simple methods and vital techniques that you can apply both on the Tennis Court, and in your lives in general.

So, let's get into it. Let's save some break points, and our rackets.

Avoiding the rabbit hole 🐰

The problem - letting go of that forehead in the bottom of the net ❌

Let me ask you this; how many times have you managed to go back and undo something that you've just done? Plenty of times in this day and age I'm sure. I bet you've pressed undo on a document, spammed control+z, and unsent that Snapchat of you saying 'hey you up' at 3 am to that girl who once let you borrow a pencil in math class a decade ago. She ain't interested bro; it's time to perpetually chase gains instead.

Sure, some things you can undo. Some things are firmly within your control. In fact, that's what the majority of this guide will tell you. However, some things aren't. As scary as that may be, that's absolutely fine. Even if you're a strong type A like me who wants to control everything around them. True control of your environment is understanding and accepting what falls outside of your sphere of influence, and mitigating and planning for potential outcomes rather than allowing a wave of hopelessness to wash over you. Or more simply...

It's pointless getting angry and frustrated at the things that you can do nothing about.

How many times have you managed to undo that shot you just hit? Undo that serve? Undo that glory-hunting forehead you've just hooped onto the roof of the clubhouse?

It goes without saying really, but you cannot control+z everything, as much as you want to.

Sure, you're in control of the shot that put you in this position in the first place, right?

Actually, no you're not. You WERE in control of that shot. You're not anymore. It's gone, and it's done. Not even Will Smith painted blue, singing 'friend like me' could turn back the clock on that one. If you plan to slap your next return back though, he's your man.

Our mind is not as rational as people often think; our mind often cannot tell the difference between past, present and future when dealing with our emotions. Every person on Earth understands that they cannot actually change the past, and yet we obsess over it. In some cases it's understandable, but in the case of your forehead at the bottom of the net, less so. But that's not to blame, we all do it. And we all have the power to stop it from happening too.

Okay, enough rambling. Time for the thesis. These are the tips and mindset alterations that I have adopted in my own game to stop myself from going down the rabbit hole, and how I keep myself in the present, and not in the past.

The solutions

Focus on the why - not on the what.

When you hit a forehand into the bottom of the net, you will often focus on the what (i.e. hitting the forehand into the bottom of the net). We often think of the outcome, and not why that outcome took place. My advice to everyone reading this would be to think about why that forehand ended up in the net.

Think about your technique; did you not bring your elbow over your shoulder, did you under or over-rotate, did you not step into the shot?

Think about your decision-making process; did you not give your opponent's shot the respect it deserved, did you go for a shot that you shouldn't have, did you attack when you should have defended?

Think about your fitness; did you attack that shot because you were out of breath, or out of the point and you were looking for a quick fix? Should you have played the point differently to avoid this?

There is always a why. Every single shot has a why. In the moment, when you feel yourself about to rage, catch yourself. It will take practice, but put it at the forefront of your mind and consciously think about 'why' this happened, not what happened. Do it in your training sessions. Do it again and again before playing a competitive match, and you'll get there. Deepen your connection with your mistakes, and you'll make less of them.

"Now; it is the most important time, for it is the only time that we have any power"

Okay, I can't take credit for that quote. Leo Tolstoy, a famous Russian author once said it. Essentially, this is the brief, case-and-point version of what I have been trying to get across. We simply cannot go back, or forward. When that shot has gone into the net, it's already too late. Focus on the why, and control your actions in the now. Losing your cool over something that has already happened in a sporting event is very human, but it's gone and out of your control. If you tell yourself this time and time again and practice this positive self-talk, you will begin to live it. But, if it's a struggle then solution 3 may be the one for you...

Don't fight your emotions; you'll lose (let them out but in a healthier way).

We are not robots; we are complex beings with irrational thoughts, feelings and emotions. Losing your mind over a Tennis ball in the net is not rational, but we've all done it. Sometimes though, and for some people (myself included) you have to feel the emotion, and let it out. If you keep bottling your emotions and frustration up, you'll explode, so it is better to let your emotions out in a little and often manner. Simply, before you have the chance to explode.


A good way of doing this is box breathing. It is a very popular practice in meditation, and for good reason. To practise box breathing, follow these simple steps:

- Breathe out slowly, releasing all of the air from your lungs
- Breathe in through your nose as you count to 4 in your head
- Hold your breath for a count of 4
- Exhale for another count of 4
- Repeat 4 times.

I use this technique when I am losing in a match, or I am getting frustrated. It is a great means of releasing frustration, in a healthy and productive way. It gives you a chance to mentally refocus, and calm your heart and breathing rate. The last thing we want to be doing is screaming, throwing rackets, or shouting abuse, as much as that does offer short-term relief. It's counter-productive in the long run, and even greats like John McEnroe have admitted it (read *Serious*, if you're serious about this).

Use these techniques, and you'll reset your body and mind in no time.

"Hey Alexa, play 'Till I Collapse' by Eminem"

The problem - a lack of control 

We Tennis players are a superstitious bunch, aren't we? I remember watching Nadal as a kid and being completely baffled by his water bottle-turning routine, or the whole fiddling with the underwear before serving thing. I remember watching Sharapova and thinking 'she's not walking on the lines on purpose', and I remember almost falling asleep waiting for Djokovic to finally stop bouncing the ball.

I was confused about these supposed superstitions until I realised I had my own routines. I just hadn't noticed. Before every first serve, I would bounce the ball 4 times, but before every second serve, I would bounce the ball twice. I'd also only set foot in the tramlines an even amount of times.

I was conscious of these things, but not of what they represented. I thought I did them because they were 'lucky'. 'Superstitions' are a key component of sport, and you'll find them in every single one. But, I believe that describing the reason you do things as 'because it's lucky' is the wrong way of going about it, even if you truly believe it is lucky. I'll explain why.

Luck is external. Luck is fleeting, unpredictable, and cannot possibly be accounted for. Boiled down further, it's simply a concoction of probability, skill, and other factors outside of your control. Like a gust of wind blowing your shot just over the net, where it would have otherwise gone into the net. The fact that you turned your water bottle to your opponent had no bearing on that gust of wind, it goes without saying.

Furthermore, we often develop these habits based on times when we have had 'good luck', or a positive event has taken place. For example, wearing a particular set of socks every time Liverpool play because you watched them win the Champions League with that pair of socks on. But, it's highly likely that if you're an avid football fan, you've watched Liverpool lose with those socks on too. But,

you overlook this. We often overlook the negatives when it comes to our superstitions. Instead, you'll wear your 'lucky socks' every single time, simply hoping that Liverpool win again.

There's nothing wrong with having these superstitions. In fact, I encourage them. BUT, you need to reframe why.

When you say 'I do this because it's lucky', subconsciously you are saying 'I do this because I want control'.

You have no control over whether Liverpool play well that day, but you want to believe that you do. You desperately want to have an element control, so you can control the outcome and ensure it is positive. So, you put on your lucky socks. You're chasing the illusion of control.

My question to you is why have the illusion of control when you can have actual control?

I'm not going to tell you I have a magic formula with which you can win every single match you play. If I had that, you'd know who I am, you'd be googling my superstitions, and I wouldn't be writing this.

But, I do have a way in which you can create a ritual, a routine, that affords you control of your mindset and emotions in the big moments. A way in which you can seize the feeling of control and use it to your advantage. And the reality is, you're probably already doing bits of it...

The solutions

Create a playlist that puts you into a focus trance

You probably saw this one coming, and for good reason. A lot of athletes have a playlist that they listen to before their games in order to put them into the right mindset. I have mine. I even have a song that I listen to just before I go out on the court (Ready for Whatever, by TI). This song puts me in my chosen mindset, which is one of grit, hustle, and determination.

When curating your playlist, consider the following factors:

- What mindset do I want to have? (i.e. determined, happy, confident, calm)
- The lyrics of the song, and do they match your chosen mindset (e.g. the lyrics to 'lose yourself' by Eminem probably aren't going to make you happy or calm, so make sure the songs match your mindset).
- Choose a theme song - the one song that above all others makes you feel as if you can conquer the world. Listen to that last.
- Consider putting the playlist of shuffle on your walk/drive to your match. Remember how you felt the last time an unexpected song came on the radio that you hadn't heard in 10 years? You probably got very animated, and that's because randomness in music is associated with dopamine release.

- Consider listening to one song on repeat. Contrary to the last bit of advice, listening to one song on repeat can put you into a flow state and aid your performance. Choose between the two options, and do what works best for you.
- Pick songs with a strong beat; your brain loves patterns and rhythms, and a predictable, strong beat will likely help you get into your chosen mindset.

Remember what has worked for you in the past

No, not what socks you wore on the day Liverpool won the Champions League. Think about it differently; think about the last time you played a fantastic match, and you were in the right mindset. Not whether your forehand was good, but when your mindset was good. That's what we are trying to invoke.

What did you do that day? Did you do a certain activity before playing? Did you eat a certain meal? Did you go for a walk or a run? Think about something tangible that you did prior to a fantastic match and integrate it into your pre-match routine. Experiment with it too. For example, if you integrate a run into your pre-match routine because you associated it with improved mental performance, but your mental performance suffers in matches that follow, reevaluate and see if there was another factor that was helping you that you were overlooking. Maybe it was the breakfast that you ate that gave you a good amount of energy and aided your mindset.

Also, it's advisable to modify and add/change elements of your routine over time, but slowly. Acknowledge when something is or isn't working, and change it accordingly.

Have a 'shit is going sideways' ritual

This advice is similar to the box breathing advice from the previous section; you must have a routine to pull yourself back from the brink during a match. This routine must...

- Either calm you down or fire you up, depending on what you most likely need help with
- Allow you to regain control of your mind and emotions
- Be consciously done - this can't be something you do without thinking.

This routine could be as simple as going to the back of the court and wiping your face with a towel. It could be box breathing. It could be playing with your racket string. It could be a combination of all of these things.

Over time, think about what you can do to hit the points above that can be done subtly and calmly. My routine is to go to the back, talk to myself, and jump up and down to get myself back into the mindset. I'll practise box breathing if I'm angry, but normally the rest is sufficient. Develop your 'shit is going sideways' ritual over time, and your mindset control will be second to none.

Remember; it's not lucky, it is control-inducing

No action here, just one to remember. When you call something 'lucky', you are taking control away from yourself. You are acknowledging a lack of control, an external locus of control. What you need, and what you want, is to be in control. The actions and routines are largely similar, but change how you think about them, and give yourself power and control. You're telling your mind that you can do this, rather than telling it you need external help. Take back control, and you'll thank yourself for it.

Talk to the towel 🤔

The problem - negative self-talk ❌

Ever watched a Krygios match and been entertained, disappointed, and in awe all at once? Yep, I get it. One minute he's hitting a 100mph forehand that defies the laws of physics. The next, he's screaming at the umpire and telling them that the water bottle simply 'slipped out of his hand' (if you don't know what I'm on about, YouTube it, it's a treat). The next he's asking the crowd where he should serve. In my opinion, it's Tennis at its most entertaining. I'm a big fan.

However, there's one thing he does that frustrates me beyond belief because he should know better. Tennis has always had its bad boys, and that only makes it more watchable in my opinion and brings more people to the sport. But the negative self-talk that he engages in makes him hard to watch. He'll start talking about how terrible his Tennis is, and it's game over at that point. There's no coming back.

We've all been there. A shot drifts out, hits the net, or your opponent hits a winner straight past you and you let yourself have it.

*'Why the f*ck did you do that?'*

'You're so stupid'

'What on Earth was that?'

Completely normal and completely understandable, but detrimental beyond simply spurring your opponent on. Not only are you letting them know that they've got you on the ropes, but you are telling your own brain that you are not good enough.

Your brain listens to you when you talk like that. Your brain, over time, starts to believe what you are telling it, regardless of whether you mean it or not (which most of the time you won't. This will affect your confidence in yourself, and therefore your ability to carry out your game plan. You'll become hesitant in your decision-making, and second-guess what you're doing. You'll spiral and talk to yourself negatively more, followed by a further performance decrease, and so on and so on.

When you engage in negative self-talk, you open the floodgates. You get will angry, you will get frustrated, and believe it or not it will have physiological effects on you too. Players often experience

heightened levels of anxiety and tension, and increased heart rates, which can all lead to muscle tightness, decreased mobility and decreased endurance given how much attention and energy you are using to sow the seeds of your own downfall.

Fortunately, there is a whole host of psychological techniques that you can use to curb your self-talk and maintain your performance levels, or even increase them when times are tough. I've tried them, tested them, and cut the crap. Here are the things that work. Because trust me, if you're going to cut out one bad habit today, let it be this one.

The solutions

Looking crazy is better than losing; talk to the towel

There's a reason this is the title. Yes, you may look a little crazy to onlookers when you do this, but who cares, that's the price of glory.

When you are feeling heated, out of control, and in danger of telling yourself how shit you are, head to your towel at the back of the court. I leave mine hanging in the fence typically, just so I have an excuse to do this.

Take the full duration of your break between points. Wipe your face, and then talk to yourself. Talk about the following things. The key is to put a positive spin on what you're saying and word it in a way that takes out the negative points.

- Why is your game plan not working
 - i.e. I need to change my game plan to win. My game plan of x is not working because of y reasons.
- Tell yourself you are capable and what you need to do
 - i.e. I am capable of playing better than this. In order to play better, I must do x, y, and z.
- Repeat your new game plan to yourself
 - i.e. Hit to the backhand, hit to the backhand, hit to the backhand.
- Pump yourself up and give a show of strength
 - i.e. COME ON, YOU'VE GOT THIS. LET'S GO.

My personal recommendation would be to whisper the first 3 bullet points but shout the last one. Do your work in silence, and let your show of strength make the noise. This will tell your brain that you can do it, even when you're doubting yourself. It'll also show your opponent that you can't be broken that easily and that they'll have to do way more to beat you. It's these little tricks that will help you in the moment, and even though they may seem odd I assure you they are incredibly powerful once

you get the hang of it. They'll keep you in the game, and help you to avoid the deadly negative self-talk spiral.

"I see pride, I see power, I see a badass mudder', who don't take no crap off of nobody!"

What a scene, what a movie. Probably my favourite scene of the movie. If you have no idea what that quote is from, then educate yourself and type that sentence in on Youtube before I lose any and all respect for you.

For those of you who haven't seen Cool Runnings, after this scene, Junior (the one who storms off) returns to the bar to finally stand up for himself to the captain of the German bobsled team and starts a massive brawl in the bar. Trust me, you're cheering him on all the way.

It's an iconic moment, and it's actually a teachable moment. What Junior is practising in this scene is positive affirmations. This is becoming a popular technique and is regularly used by athletes and gymgoers to train their minds to focus on their strengths and capabilities, rather than their limitations and weaknesses. This will help you build a positive self-image over time (and it does take time) and will help you to build your confidence, which will only serve you well on the court.

In order to practise positive affirmations, there are several things that you can do:

- Choose affirmations that are meaningful to you. Your affirmations have to resonate with you personally. It's no good telling yourself that you're a beautiful soul and a fantastic chef if you want to tear shit up on the Tennis Court. Instead, tell yourself that you are a warrior, a fighter, and you'll never give in. Match them to your personality and choose the ones that make you feel powerful.
- Repeat your affirmations daily. Do this in the mirror every day. Look at yourself and tell yourself how great you are. It'll seem weird at first, but as time goes on it'll form a vital part of your daily routine, and you'll be able to pick yourself up when you're down.
- Make them specific and realistic. It's no good telling yourself that you're the greatest Tennis player who has ever walked the Earth, as unless you're Nadal it's not true. Your brain also knows it isn't true, and this won't work if the statements that you're choosing are ridiculous. Be grounded, but recognise and integrate your potential. The person you can see yourself being.

Follow these steps and you'll start to believe in yourself, and you'll be able to keep the Tennis court demons away. Speaking of which...

Tackle your demons

Look, I'm not a professional psychologist as much as I dish out advice. I am simply sharing what has worked for me and what I believe to be true.

I believe that if you are constantly ripping yourself apart on the Tennis Court, then it is quite plausible that there is more going on in your head and in your mind than you realise. It is possible that you're taking feelings of frustration from your relationships, work, finances, or any other areas of your life out onto the court with you. This in turn is changing what was once an outlet for you, into another source of pain or frustration. I've been there, and if you're smashing your racket or shouting abuse then you're probably fighting some other demons.

I am not going to suggest going to therapy or something like that. That's a bit too heavy for this document, and furthermore, that may not be something that will work for you. However, it's definitely worth considering for everybody, regardless of mental state.

What I will suggest however is practising mindfulness and meditation. I use this in my own life, and it allows me to focus on the stresses of my day and melt them away (or at least lessen them, and make me capable of dealing with them). I am fortunate and have not had any mental health issues in my life, but even so, I find a true benefit from meditation that calms me down and refocuses me on what is important. This has correlated with a drop of racket smashing and shouting, much to my coach's delight.

Mindfulness and meditation may seem a bit hippy for you (it did for me prior to taking the plunge) but it definitely doesn't have to be. You can follow these simple steps to start practising mindfulness.

- Find a quiet, comfortable space: Sit in a comfortable chair or on the floor with your back straight, and close your eyes.
- Focus on your breath: Begin by taking a few deep breaths, focusing on the sensation of the breath moving in and out of your body. Then, let your breath settle into its natural rhythm.
- Notice your thoughts: You may notice that your mind starts to wander and you start thinking about the footie at the weekend, whether that girl in the coffee shop is single or what was that song you heard on the bus 10 years ago. That's okay, it's all part of the fun. Simply notice the thoughts as they arise, without judgment, and gently bring your focus back to your breath.
- Expand your awareness: Once you feel comfortable focusing on your breath, you can start to expand your awareness to other aspects of your experience, such as your body sensations, your emotions, and the sounds around you.
- Practice regularly: To reap the benefits of mindfulness, it's important to practice regularly. Start with just a few minutes per day and gradually increase the time as you feel more comfortable.

I learned all of this on an app called Balance, which I highly recommend downloading. At the time of writing, they offer it free for a year (no, I'm not an affiliate and I'm not getting paid to suggest this). There are loads of meditation apps out there, but that was the one that I found most helpful as it teaches you how to meditate from the ground up. It's not about sitting in a circle and singing Kumbaya, it's about basic techniques that help you face your everyday challenges. This will help you with your overall focus, temperament and attitude on the court if done regularly. Give it a go!

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Seeing is believing 🙄

The problem - not believing that you can make that shot ❌

One of my favourite songs right now is 'Put you on game' by Russ. One of the lyrics is 'believe what you see, you've got to be dumb to believe what you heard'. Not only is that generally solid life advice, but it can also be applied to a Tennis scenario.

Picture this; coaches and spectators saying that you can't make that shot. That you can't beat that player. That you are not capable of winning.

But you've seen yourself overcome tough odds. You've seen yourself go toe to toe with players that may be technically stronger than you. You've seen yourself make that difficult shot when the chips are down.

In the moment, what should you believe; what you've heard, or what you've seen?

It's probable you'll listen to the voices of the doubters, the armchair coaches, and the people who've never picked up a racket in your life. It can really mess with your head. If you've seen any of my other content, I often reference a 'crybaby backstory' of mine that involves the father of a player I used to compete against say 'Connor is shit, just hit to his backhand' and how my frustration got the better of me in that match, despite playing a very solid match. I let that voice get in my head. It was in my head long after that match. But I turned around and told myself I was going to change something. When I talk about this, I am typically referring to my physique on the court, but there was a mental element too.

I employed several techniques to help myself fend off the doubters when I wasn't playing my best, or even when I was. These techniques also work on my biggest critic of all; myself.

So what can you do? How can you control your inner critic, and turn the critique of others into jet fuel?

The solutions ✅

Don't trivialise, visualise

Remember what I said about believing what you see? That's where this comes in.

Yes, you've probably hit blinders before. A screamer around the net posts or a drop shot that bounces back onto your side of the court. They're important for this technique, but they aren't everything.

Visualising is a technique that involves creating mental images of your desired outcomes, situations or scenarios. This is an incredibly underutilised and powerful psychological tool as it allows you to

mentally rehearse your performance, and what you're planning to do, and convinces your mind that what you are about to attempt is realistic, doable and that you've done it before. Even if you haven't.

There are several facets to visualising; some of which involve making up scenarios in your head and watching yourself go through the motions, or alternatively you are remembering what you've done before, and therefore acknowledging that you're capable of greatness. The following is a breakdown of these facets;

- **Envision success** - imagine yourself playing the best possible Tennis you can imagine. Imagine hitting winners from nowhere, moving like a gazelle in the Serengeti, and turning the unwinnable into a highlight reel. When you do this, do your utmost to engage all of your senses in the visualisation as the more senses you have linked, the more your brain believes it. Ever walked into a bakery, smelled something and been taken back to a happy childhood memory? Same principle. Utilise your senses. Imagine the sound of the ball hitting the strings, the feeling of the sun on your skin, or the smell of the grass court.
- **Practice problem-solving and strategy** - this one is challenging, but it can be helpful for some to visualise themselves dealing with difficult situations in your match. If you're prone to temper tantrums, picture yourself controlling your emotions with one of the techniques mentioned above. Picture yourself regrouping after making a mistake. Picture yourself playing an opponent in your past, and what you could have done differently to turn the tide of the match, and watch that scenario unfold.
- **Visit the highlight reel** - remember that amazing shot you hit against that opponent you can't stand. Relish it. Remember that ace you hit at match point down that went through the fence? Relive it. Remember that time you heard someone on the sidelines say 'how the hell did they make that'? Watch it. Visualising your favourite past successes is a good way of reinforcing your belief in yourself and building your match confidence. It's my personal favourite of the techniques, but remember to watch ones that are specific to the opponent or challenge that you're up against to make it even more effective. Does the opponent have a cannon for a serve? Picture yourself hitting a series of your best returns.

This may seem trivial if you're new to the idea; I appreciate that. But by doing any of the techniques in this guide you are priming and training your mind to be ready for any situations that come your way. The more you practice, the more ready you'll be. My advice would be to just dive in and give it a go. If it doesn't work for you, try another technique or adapt the current one to work for you. I strongly believe that everyone can find some solace and confidence in these techniques if given the appropriate attention and respect.

Kill em' with kindness

Ah, the mantra of customer service workers the world over. Not to mention a pretty catchy Selena Gomez song, I say almost unashamedly. This is a technique I swear by the power of.

For those who haven't been humbled by a restaurant, bar or cafe gig at some point in their lives, killing them with kindness is a method of dealing with criticism. When you receive an angry, un-called-for comment from a customer, they are sometimes looking for a bite. Or, they are saying

what they're saying as they know you can't respond. You can't turn around and say 'you know what, do one' as they know you'll get fired.

Instead, you have to deal with their criticism in a polite manner and often hold your true feelings back. This is where killing them with kindness comes in. Nothing offsets an angry person more than someone being overly nice to them. And that's the general idea. Be as nice as you possibly can, and absorb every ounce of negative energy they throw your way. They'll hate it, and you'll come to love it.

Let me tell you how this works in practice. I ordered a phone recently from a company that will remain nameless for their own protection. The courier lost it and I was without one. I was also in London for work, and couldn't contact my family or my girlfriend very easily. I spoke to their customer service rep on chat and demanded that they sent a new phone out that day, as I paid for premium delivery. They told me that I had to fill in a form, they had to go back to the supplier with that form, and they'd be in touch with me when they concluded their investigation. This did not sparkle with me. I kept respectfully raging that their customer service rep, to which I was met with messages like, and I shit you not...

"Good morning Connor, I hope your day thus far has been filled with splendour, wonder, and happiness. We have not yet finished our investigation but will update you in 48 hours. Have a joyous and peaceful weekend".

Anyone who knows me will know that this would only enrage me further, but there was nothing I could do. Every single angry message was met with something like this. I could not break down their armour of disingenuous customer care.

I never got my phone. After 2 weeks they agreed to send me a refund but by this time I had just ordered one from Amazon. I sent the most scathing review I'm sure that company has ever received, which believe me was therapeutic. But, in every experience in life, there are lessons to be learned, and this was no different.

Killing your critics with kindness works. Raging at them does not. Typically, it only emboldens them to continue tormenting you. Of course, there are exceptions to this. But this is a good technique to use when you are hearing criticism from the sidelines. You can use it in the following ways...

- Thank them for their kind words.
- Thank them for caring so much about your Tennis that they chose to analyse it.
- Simply smile at them.
- Thank them for their 'feedback' and say you'll take it onboard.
- And best of all; reframe their criticism as feedback. I come from a corporate world, and often criticism is levied under the banner of 'constructive feedback'. Calling it constructive feedback often doesn't change what they are actually trying to say, but it does often take the sting out. It makes the criticism appear kinder. If you take the mindset of 'they aren't just criticising me, they are giving me constructive feedback that I can action' then you allow your brain to take the negativity out of the words, and out of the situation. It might seem trivial, but give it a go next time someone talks shit about you, and see if it's an effective technique for you. Personally, I'm a big fan.

So there you have it. Channel your inner Selena, and kill em' with kindness. The single most annoying them to be on the receiving end of, and one of the most satisfying things to dish out. That's how you know that it's the good stuff.

Game, set, match - a summary 🎾

If you've got this far, you must like what you're reading. I truly hope that you do. These techniques have come to me over the many years that I've been playing Tennis and have completely and utterly revolutionised my mentality and subsequently my demeanour on the court. It's aided my game more than any individual technique tweek ever has.

That's because Tennis is far more mental than most give it credit for. Of course, it's one of the most physical and gruelling sports in the world, but if your mind isn't right then no amount of conditioning and training will prepare you for what you face. You're alone when you're on that court; there aren't 10 other players to pick you up and talk sense into you, and there's no coach to sub you off if you aren't playing well. When you're playing badly, you have to carry on. If you get your head right and be able to pull yourself back from the abyss and you'll stand the chance of turning the game right back around.

Here is a summary of all of the techniques that we've covered;

Avoiding the rabbit hole 🐰

- Focus on the why, and not the what (*focus on why the shot went into the net, and not the fact that it's on the net*)
- "Now; it is the most important time, for it is the only time that we have any power" (*you can't change what's happened, so practice letting things go in the moment*)
- Don't fight your emotions; you'll lose (*practice a series of techniques for letting your emotions out in a healthier and calmer manner*)

"Hey Alexa, play 'Till I Collapse' by Eminem" 🎵

- Create a playlist that puts you into a focus trance
- Remember what has worked for you in the past (*with regards to creating a winning routine*)
- Have a 'shit is going sideways' ritual (*box breathing is a great ritual to adopt*)
- Remember; it's not lucky, it is control-inducing (*reframe your perspective, and make your own luck*)

Talk to the towel 🧻

- Looking crazy is better than losing; talk to the towel (*what it says on the tin*)

- “I see pride, I see power, I see a badass mudder’, who don’t take no crap off of nobody!”
(create positive affirmations and practice them in the mirror, just like *Cool Runnings*)
- Tackle your demons (consider a meditation app - no, I’m being serious)

Seeing is believing 🧐

- Don’t trivialise, visualise (practice various visualisation techniques)
- Kill em’ with kindness (the best method for dealing with the haters)

These 12 methods, especially when some of them are combined, will stand you in good stead to turn your mental game around, and deal with those Break Points (I thought of the name before Netflix did it). Thank you so much for downloading this guide; I’ve thoroughly enjoyed writing it and sharing my ‘wisdom’ with you all. if you like what you’ve read consider joining my free [14 day challenge \(Breaking the Baseline\)](#), or enquiring about [Bootcamp; my paid 12 week plan](#). All details are available on [my website](#) and via the embedded links in this paragraph. I hope to hear from you soon 🙌