

Handling nerves before a match and the importance of having a back up.

By Allistair McCaw

Everyone gets them, even the greats of sport - Nerves. Isn't it comforting to know that you're not alone?

I always like to remind the athletes I work with that the day you don't feel those butterflies in the stomach before going out to compete is the day you should really get worried. Personally speaking, as a former professional athlete, I saw nerves as my bodies own way of telling me it was ready for action, ready to compete! Nerves were my adrenaline. Nerves were a way of telling me that what I was about to do meant something special to me. I just had to make sure there was a toilet nearby that's all!

Having worked with many world class athletes and winners of major sporting events such as World Opens and grand slams, as a performance coach, I can tell you that they even get those same feeling's you and I get. The feelings of uncertainty, fear and sweaty palms.

Here's the reality: There's no point of worrying about a match or an opponent because when you step onto the court it's too late. It's showtime.

The key to confidence and over coming nerves is knowing that you've already put in the work and prepared as best as possible. Then you have to be satisfied with that and make do with it no matter what happens.

Back up plan

Have you ever found yourself thinking too much on court and in the process simply forgotten how to put the ball back in play? When you're on the court competing, your goal should be to just play without thinking about it. All that thinking and planning was done or at least should have been done on the practice court before. When you're competing it's time for your body to take over and do what it's been trained to do.

Through numerous hours of practicing you have developed a subconscious game style and have certain strategies that will come automatically to you. Some call it muscle memory, I like to call it 'Instinctive response'.

However, sometimes in a match it's important to revisit those basic key strategies or helping tips. Especially at times when you're not feeling a particular stroke for example or are not to sure about something.

Having a little book or piece of paper in your bag on court with you with some points written down can go a long way. It can be seen as your personal coach, advisor and reminder.

Usually when you are more fatigued you will have less 'clarity' to think logically, it can be taken out between games and looked at to help you.

Things written down can include technical and tactical tips and even what to do if you get tight in the match.

Keep them simple, you don't want to be sitting there reading an encyclopedia. Just one word or a line is enough per subject.

Remember that **SIMPLE IS BETTER**. There is a **SOLUTION** for everything. **STAY CALM**, have **PATIENCE** and **BELIEVE** it will get better.

Allistair McCaw is a performance fitness coach who has worked with numerous world class athletes like the world number one's in squash and tennis Nicol David and Dinara Safina.

You can visit his webpage at www.athletesconditioning.com