

VISION & MISSION STATEMENTS FOR PLAYERS—PART 2

PERFORMER

Almost every company and organization has a vision and mission statement. In our programs at NVTC, we have harnessed the power of vision & mission statements to direct our player development. I have created a performance player vision statement and targeted mission statements to help all our coaches and players get on the same page about where we are going and how we intend to get there.

This vision statement is my version of some original work by top international coach Louis Cayer:

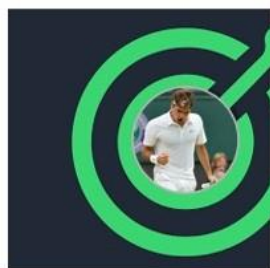
"A Performer who is an Athlete that Plays Smart with Functional Shots."



In part 1 of this series ([See 1st article link](#)), we outlined how the vision ties all the **4 Performance Factors** of *Psychological, Physical, Tactical* and *Technical* together to create an 'Integrated' player. (for a more detailed article on the Integrated approach, [click here](#))

This article will deal with the 'Performer' component of the vision and connect it to a mission statement that defines how to get there.

Our mission statement to develop a 'Performer' is:



'PERFORMER' DEVELOPMENT MISSION

"To transform players' beliefs, values, mindsets, attitudes and energy through the elements of Head, Heart & Legs so they can execute under pressure."

Every component of the vision statement is important; however, 'Performer' is the hinge on which all others swing. To 'perform' means to be able to do all the other components of the vision under the pressure of competition when it counts.

We can apply the formula used by the Roy Group Coaching organization:

$$P = p - i$$

Performance = potential – interference

To perform in the way you are capable of is your 'potential.' Multiple elements can obstruct performing to potential. This 'interference' is what needs to be addressed by a coach to develop a player into a 'Performer.'

To make it easier, we can package the elements of beliefs, values, mindsets, attitudes & energy into a 'performer package' of **Head, Heart & Legs**. Let's explore each one and the potential interferences of each.

DEVELOPING A PERFORMER – 'HEART'

Our definition of 'Heart' is:

'Being a confident competitor by applying full effort under adversity.'

It seems strange a player would withdraw effort when trying to win a match, but pressure does funny things to players. Psychologists call the withdrawal of effort 'Tanking.' The ability to keep fighting even though the circumstances may be formidable is a quality that can be improved and trained. Another way to describe being a competitor is to possess a '*Never give up*' attitude.

Players tank when they **predict the effort required to overcome a challenge will not yield the desired result. So why bother?** This unfortunate attitude can take effect in a point (e.g. "*That shot is too good, I won't be able to get to it.*"); a game (e.g. "*They are up too many points to win this game.*"), a set, a match, or tournament. It is the interference that stems from a lack of **belief**.

Players can reach balls they don't think they can when they believe. They can win matches when down in the score (Comebacks, even from match point, happen all the time in tennis). They can embrace being an 'underdog' against a higher-rated opponent. The common word for self-belief is **confidence** which is essential for tennis performance. Confidence is a precious commodity that needs to be guarded and nurtured by both player and coach.

Adversity & failure interferes with the beliefs of a confident competitor:

'Adversity' is when errors, seeming superior opponents and losses are perceived as 'evidence' telling a player they are mistaken to have self-belief. The result is confidence-destroying fear of failure, the belief that poor performance will be inevitable and yield negative consequences.

Failure is frowned upon in our culture. Failure is taken as a devaluing of your worth as a person. No wonder players freak out when they miss in a tournament. To withdraw effort and give yourself the out, "Well, I could have done it if I tried," is preferable to facing the reality of giving it all but falling short.

The solution is to be goal-driven but understand the game's nature and the role of failure, so you become goal-resilient. In tennis, failure is inevitable, whether missing a shot, losing a match, etc. Tennis has a unique scoring system. Tennis matches are mostly lost (through unforced errors) rather than won. If you defeat an opponent 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 (a solid result), you have most likely lost over 100 points! You can be a top 10 world-ranked player and not win a major tournament (if you are a consistent semi-finalist or finalist). Understanding '**tennis math**' is critical. To be one of the best players in the world, you only need to win 52% of all the points you play.

Failure is also the key to all learning. We have a phrase in my programs, "**Fail Forward.**" As long as one is determined to move forward, failure will only be a 'hiccup' along the way rather than an impenetrable barrier—a stepping stone to better skills, attitudes, etc.

*“The solution is to be goal-driven but understand the game’s nature and the role of failure, so you become **goal-resilient**”.*

Wayne Elderton -Coaching Educator

Perfectionism interferes with the mindset of a confident competitor:

Although constant failure can hurt confidence and hinder being a competitor, perfectionism is just as damaging. A perfectionist is typically debilitated by failure. The problem is not the drive to be perfect (it is a great attitude to try not to miss a ball). It is what happens when they don't make it. An attitude of '**I can't make mistakes**' becomes a psychology of avoidance rather than goal achievement. The result is playing tentative and with a lack of trust in yourself. Although many top players may describe themselves as perfectionists, they are, in reality, 'recovering perfectionists,' having learned to handle failure and confidently maintain effort.

Expectations interfere with the attitudes of a confident competitor:

It is common for players to 'under-perform' in competitions. They don't play like they do in practice. Because they can play well in practice, this raises their expectations and can add to the challenges faced in competition.

Expectations can exert emotional pressure and have the potential to set up crippling self-beliefs, colouring the way a player views themselves and their play.

Let me illustrate: I would be happy if you told me we are going to Disneyland. If you said instead of going to Disneyland, I would only get an ice cream cone, getting the cone would upset me. Why? I had the *expectation* of a certain outcome when that wasn't achieved, it affected me adversely. Giving me the cone was a good thing; however, it was the **loss** I perceived that ruined me.

The further into a match a player gets, the greater the expectations for specific outcomes (could be on a single shot, point, game, set, etc.). Ever wonder why, for most players, a miss in the first game doesn't produce the same emotional negativity as one in the final set? A perceived investment mounts as the match (or even a point) goes on, which players count as 'more to lose.' The result is again, fear of failure.

To develop a competitor', one needs to help them to overcome the perceived loss. Not to try to 'save' what they have but instead to **'go for the goal.'**

“If tennis is all about managing failure, then tennis coaching is about ‘supported failure.’”

Wayne Elderton -Coaching Educator

Coach feedback to develop a confident competitor:

If you are in an environment where failure is frequent and inevitable, yet, your job is not to make mistakes, what kind of coach do you need? One of the phrases we have in our initial Canadian Tennis Professional certification level is, "*You are not coaching skills. You are coaching people*". In all this process, the 'person' needs to be kept in mind over the physical skills they need to learn.

Too much hardship can crush a player's spirit and sour their tennis experience in a training or competitive environment. Constant failing runs the risk of destroying a player's confidence. It is essential for the coach to 'feel out' how much the player can handle. The most adept coaches can take players to their limits and a little beyond. This can be an uncomfortable process. Players need a coach who believes they can go further and do more than they believe. The 'inspirational' qualities of the coach can help players take on the identity of a competitor. When the evidence says you shouldn't believe in yourself, a coach's belief is 'caught' (rather than 'taught').

I remember the comment of a wheelchair player I coached to the top 10 of the world. In an interview question, "How did your coach help you the most" he said, "*He helped me believe I could get balls I didn't believe I could.*" In wheelchair tennis, this is even more critical than in able-bodied tennis. To be a competitor means one believes they can do it!

“Leaders can let you fail and not let you be a failure.”

-General Stanley McChrystal-US Commander of International forces

The feedback strategy for the coach is to be a ‘Velvet hammer.’ Unwavering belief and inspirational motivation, but tough, uncompromising encouragement to never give up. No predictions of *“I can't do it”* allowed. The ideal environment a coach can create is one of high demand but high positive feedback (for a more detailed article on positive feedback, [click here](#))

Competitor versus Competitiveness and Character (Values):

It is important to note that I am distinguishing between being a 'competitor' and 'competitiveness.' The insatiable desire to win is being 'overly competitive.' While some of that attitude is useful, it has a negative side.

Some players **hate** losing, even manipulating all they can to win, sometimes to the point of cheating. These players need to be shaped. I believe the larger values of integrity and sportsmanship must be given greater weight in their minds. 'Winning at all costs' is a way to get short-term results but lose in life. I am just as happy publicizing that our players have won numerous sportsmanship awards as winning titles. Even though we have a program that has developed multiple national champions and scholarship players, etc., it is Values-based.

DEVELOPING A PERFORMER – ‘HEAD’

Playing with a good 'Head' means playing with focus & intention. We can define focus as: '**Selective attention to task-relevant details.**' And includes the following characteristics:

- **Task Relevant:** This is the ability to narrow attention to the things that help play successfully and to apply 'selective inattention' to what doesn't help. For example, attention on people watching the match will hurt play. Tasks can be:
 - **Technical:** For example, focusing on centring every shot on the strings or timing the ball at the ideal impact point. One training goal is for technique to be an automatic habit, requiring less technical focus.
 - **Perception/Anticipation:** Tennis requires 'reading' many elements of a situation. For example, identifying the ball received will be deep or seeing if an opponent is in trouble to attack. On every shot, a player must shift their focus of attention from themselves (e.g. hitting the shot well) to what is happening on the other side of the court and back again. Attention on the appropriate cues can even be used for anticipation.

- **Tactical:** This is important, but we will cover it in the 'intention' section below.
- **'Here & Now':** Great athletes often describe focus as 'Being in the moment.' Any attention given to what is coming (future) or what has happened (past) is not available for what the player is doing **right here, right now**. For example, we can be focused on the mistake we just made, which cripples our ability to play well. Alternatively, if we get caught up in what could happen, it will also ruin play (e.g. *'If I don't get this 2nd serve in, I will lose the game*).
- **Process vs Outcome oriented:** The outcomes of play (e.g. winning, losing, rankings, etc.) are outside our control. Wasting focus on outcomes will not make them happen and distract from performance. Tennis is an evil sport psychologically. A good *process* gives you the best chance to get your desired outcome. In contrast, focusing on the outcome will ruin your process. How many players have blown a lead when they thought, *"If I just win this point, I will win the set"*? Trying to win can paradoxically be the quickest way to lose in tennis.

“Focus in tennis is not about maintaining constant concentration but rather re-focusing repeatedly after multiple distractions”.

Starting in the Ideal Performance State:

There are multiple distractions in a match but also multiple opportunities to regain focus. Every top player effectively uses the time between points and end changes. World renown Psychological expert, Dr, Jim Loehr, created the '16 Second Cure' to gain the ideal mental and emotional state (Called the IPS, "Ideal Performance State") before engaging in every point.

It is essential that each point is started independently and 'Fresh' with any negative thoughts & feelings that obstruct IPS managed effectively. Regarding focus, players must **start the point with a plan** (Typically, the tactics for their first three shots and overall goal of what to do to their opponent.). The IPS is gained through a serve or return routine consistently performed before starting every point.

Intention:

Intention weaves all the previous focus points together. Intention can be defined as: **'The process task you want to achieve here & now to perform the shot successfully.'** It is your goal for the shot.

Tennis is horrible for players hitting thousands of 'brainless' balls for hours and calling it 'training.' This type of training fails to improve a player's ability to perform tactics.

Tactical intention is essential since the goal is to **play** the game of tennis. In turn, tactics determine technique. In subsequent articles, we will explore this more in the vision statement's 'Plays Smart' component.

*“Tactical intention is essential since the goal is to **play** the game of tennis”.*

DEVELOPING A PERFORMER – ‘LEGS’

Even though this blends into the 'Athlete' component of the vision, it has different priorities. The quality of 'Legs' can be defined as: **'The intensity, energy and desire a player brings to the execution of their shots.'** It is the 'work ethic' a player brings to the court developed through practice that make intensity, energy & desire a habit. Practice intensity is the enthusiasm, will and commitment to practice with a goal-driven purpose. A lack of these can interfere with being a performer.

This is seen in behaviours like:

- The effort to get behind every ball in a rally
- Never letting the ball bounce twice in drills
- Maintaining an 'athletic posture' during a point
- The effort to recover after every shot
- Desire to get to every volley and overhead when at net

For a coach, the path is simple, if a player isn't trying, doing more work and feedback on skills will yield no transformation of performance. There is no point in doing a *drill*, to work on a *skill*, if there is no *will*.

It is important to note that coaches often misunderstand 'intensity.' They look for a player bouncing around and having 'Happy feet.' The challenge is this can cause muscular tension and fights against being smooth and effortless. It is possible to be 'over-intense.' A tight and 'hyper' player will typically break down when the pressure comes.

“There is no point doing a drill. to work on a skill, if there is no will.”

DEVELOPING A PERFORMER - CONCLUSION

Coaches often fall into the trap of, after a tournament loss, doing even more *skill* work (e.g. 'Fix' their technique). However, if being a 'Performer' isn't trained, players can improve skills to higher and higher levels and still lose to the same opponents in the same ways.

If we apply the formula **P=p-i** (Performance=potential-interference) a coach can minimize interference in the areas of beliefs, values, mindsets, attitudes and energy so players can perform to potential in tournament play.

Players need to become *goal-oriented, goal-driven and goal-resilient* through the performer package of *Head, Heart & Legs*:

- **Head: 'Selective attention to task-relevant details (including Tactical intention).'**

Tennis requires the ability to constantly re-focus because of its stop-and-start nature and all the possible external and internal distractions. Players with good re-focus abilities keep thoughts and actions directed to the things that will help them play successfully (technical, perceptual or tactical). Tactical intention helps players be goal-oriented for their shots to play the game successfully.

- **Heart: 'Being a confident competitor by applying full effort under adversity.'**

Players need training in achieving the tricky knife-edge balance between total commitment and effort to achieve a goal and healthy management of errors. To go for a goal with determination but re-set and keep fighting upon encountering failure or crippling expectations. Predicting you will fail or withdrawing effort after failure is not the quality of being a confident competitor. Players need to understand the nature of tennis where, unlike other sports, every point can be a turning point.

- **Legs: 'The intensity, energy and desire a player brings to the execution of their shots.'**

If 'Heart' is about never withdrawing effort, 'Legs' is about applying the effort in the first place. As the cliché says, 'To give 100%'. It is a commitment to excellence and a dogged determination to do whatever is necessary to execute well.

“If being a 'Performer' isn't trained, players can improve skills to higher and higher levels and still lose to the same opponents in the same ways’

‘PERFORMER’ TRAINING ENVIRONMENT - DRILLS & GAMES

“Under pressure, you don’t rise to the occasion, you sink to the level of your training.”

-Navy Seal

When training to be a Performer, the training is often not 'nice.' It is designed to be uncomfortable, to take the player to their limits and help push past. Being a Performer can be trained by systematically creating an adversity-filled training environment with effective, positive and belief-inspiring coaching feedback.

A Spanish saying goes, *'If practice is hell, matches are heaven.'* The coach will construct an environment that contains challenge and adversity, so players face fears and test focus through manipulating:

- **Scoring:** (In drills or modified point-play)
- **Ball received:** (Making the ball received more demanding so timing and movement are challenged)
- **Ball Projection (Targets):** (Demanding a specific quality of ball to send)

Almost any drill a coach does can be tweaked to be a Performer drill by modifying these elements to produce the desired result.

In my experience, players who break down in this training environment will break down similarly in tournaments. The ones that mastered themselves in this environment were often the ones that also won nationals, ITF tournaments, etc.

Note: Where drills require feeding, the feed quality is critical. Feeds must be challenging *but achievable*. If the coach feeds a ball that genuinely is impossible to get, it will erode the coach's credibility and make players closed to any feedback.

'HEART': COMPETITOR - INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT DRILLS:

To train this skill, set up drills where the player has 'invested' something. They must improve shot quality when the investment could be lost. They must be trained to 'go for the goal' with their best, regardless of what can be lost.

Here are two example drills however, the concept can be adapted for any situation (e.g. Serve, return, etc.). They address the tendency of players to get 'overly conservative' as the point progresses to protect what they have 'invested.'

'Money Ball' (In a Neutral Rally Situation):

- The coach feeds the ball to a player in a neutral rally situation.
- The player must get a specified number of balls in a sequence into a target area (the area size and location must be realistic but challenging for the level of the player). How many balls in the sequence is determined by the coach.
- Once they achieve the sequence (e.g. 5 points), they then must hit a final shot of a slightly higher quality (the 'Money ball'); otherwise, they lose **all** the points. Define the 'higher quality' ball by improved depth, placement, or power (or any combination). However, it still must be realistically achievable.
- Achieving five sequences (+ the 'Money ball') wins the game.

'Money Sequence' (Neutral Rally Situation):

Player rallies with opponent (or coach). The goal is to rally for 30 seconds. After 30 seconds, a signal is given (e.g. coach shouts, "Final Sequence"), and the next four shots (2 per player or, if they are rallying with a coach, their final two shots) must achieve a higher quality (see 'Money Ball').

'HEART': CONFIDENT COMPETITOR – 'OVERCOMER' DRILLS:

To train this trait, set up drills that provide challenging tasks that create adversity and offer a chance to fail and give up. The player is inspired to keep fighting through coaching feedback when opportunities to withdraw or lessen effort occur. ***In tennis, every point can be a turning point.***

'Score Reversal':

Play out a game with regular scoring. If a player gets to a score where they can win the game on the next point (E.g. 40-0, 40-15 or 40-30) and do not win the next point, the score is reversed (they are down 40-15, etc.). If they want, the coach can even select which point the score will be reversed (e.g. 'In this game, the reversal happens at 40-15.').

'Deuce/Ad Game':

Play a short set (first to 4 games), starting each game at Ad-in (They are serving). The set begins with a player spinning the racquet to see which player starts with Ad-in. If a player wins the spin, they choose which player starts at Ad-in. Create a culture where the 'bravery' of winning the spin and choosing to be the player down is positively reinforced. Winning the Ad-in game means the other player starts Ad-in next game. Losing a game means the player continues the next game with Ad-in. The set can also be played starting with Ad-out.

'Claw your way back':

Play points where one player is down in the score. How far they are down in the score depends on what the coach thinks the players can handle. It can be down points in a game or games in a set. 'Champion' points are only gained if the player wins from the deficit score position. (Create a culture where they want to be the ones starting in the deficit position).

+/- Target Drill:

Players have to make ten balls into a target area. They gain one point each time the ball is in the target. Ensure the target is realistically challenging and has specific measurements (e.g. the right height, distance, direction, speed, spin, or any combination). When a mistake is made (or the target not achieved), the player has a point subtracted from their score. The error becomes the adversity to recover from.

'HEAD': FOCUS & INTENTION DRILLS:

To train this skill, set tasks that require full attention & intention when there are many opportunities to be distracted. Coaches typically spend all their time training younger players' physical skills, but focus is an essential skill to train.

Two principles to keep in mind:

1. Targets are one of the best trainers of attention (and to help ignore non-relevant stuff).
2. Filling one's mind with **tactical intention** is task-relevant, here & now, process-oriented, and more beneficial than thinking about technique during play.

'Mission Possible': (Tactical Intention)

Players play practice points. Before each point, the player must reveal their plan (Mission) to the coach. Plans can be the pattern of shots they will attempt to perform (e.g. Serve wide, hit to the open court and come in) or the overall goal of what they try to do to their opponent (e.g. I will play to their backhand). The coach awards a 'Mission Point' if the plan is executed. The goal is to start every point with a clear focus and good intention and collect Mission Points (e.g. the first player to five Mission Points wins).

Plant a Distraction Game:

During point-play, the coach plants a distraction to create a difficult situation to overcome. For example, the coach can overrule line calls with bad ones or rearrange the score to see if players can maintain their focus. We challenge them by saying, *'Can the coaches break you, or can you handle it?'*

I recommend using a system to identify various advantages, disadvantages and 'pressure points' during match-play. Mike Barrell from Evolve 9 has a whole card system available (Called 'Court Warrior' cards). **For the system I have created using playing cards or dice to help adversity training be more enjoyable, [click here](#).**

Trouble Bubble Drill: (Perception focus training)

Players practice identifying when an opponent is in trouble to attack. Imagine a 'bubble' around the opponent's upper body. If the player's shot makes the opponent reach out of the bubble, they call '*trouble!*' and attack (e.g. follow into the net, etc.). Identify if the opponent is stretched, hitting high, reaching low, etc.

'LEGS': INTENSITY & ENERGY DRILLS:

To train this trait, set up drills that fatigue the player, but they must maintain quality of shot.

In 'Legs' drills, the goal is not to just run the player ragged (even a poor coach can feed balls all over and yell, 'Get to the ball!'). It is challenging their effort while measuring shot quality. If a coach can 'gamify' the drill and add an element of fun, then players start getting the message that hard work is fun.

4-Ball Torture Drill:

Coach, from the service line, feeds four balls to one player on the full court. Players must get to all four balls to get a point. An error means the turn is over.

Points can be progressively more difficult to get:

1. Just touching the ball gets a point (doesn't have to put the ball in the court)
2. Getting to the ball and hitting it anywhere into the court receives a point
3. Getting to the ball and sending it in but below the coach's head height receives a point. (Players start to get smart and hit higher shots to ensure they go in. This keeps their shots less defensive).

Drop-shot/Overhead Drill:

The coach feeds a challenging drop-shot to a player who starts behind the baseline. Once they return it, the coach feeds a lob over their head. The player is not allowed to let the ball bounce for the overhead. On both shots, the coach encourages them to keep going for it, even though they may think they cannot get it (Not pre-determining they can't make it). This can be fed as a two-column drill with up to 6 balls per turn.

Note: This drill may seem 'basic' and even 'lame' to many coaches; however, in my experience, we transformed some skilled but non-competitor players into national competitors by doing this drill every training session (for months). They went from giving up on any ball that was even a little tough ('That's impossible') to getting to every ball (no matter how good my drop-shot or lob was).

In Part 3, we will look at the "***Athlete***" component.

This article was inspired by the work of Louis Cayer.
If you would like to ask a question, give feedback, or want more information, contact us at:
acecoach.com