

At the top level it is not your physical or technical expertise which separates you from the competition but your mental toughness. To be outstanding you have to hold your nerve, perform under the most intense pressure, and consistently turn it on even when you don't feel at your best. You absolutely must manage your mental side if you want to be the best.

Given that mental strength is so vital, I find it truly amazing that it is so neglected in training routines. If you are one of those athletes who spends all your training time on technique and fitness while paying no attention to your mental side, you are doing yourself a serious disservice. We know from countless studies that mental skills are acquirable and you can, with practice, learn to perform mentally. You can improve your confidence, concentration, motivation and anxiety levels if you chose to.

Feelings affect your performance. Whether you are aware of them or not, how you feel affects how you perform. Feelings are based on what you imagine or interpret from an event and not from the event itself. Two players appearing in the Wimbledon final for the first time will imagine different things about the match. One might imagine she will be unable to play well in such a big final. This player is likely to feel nervous and uncertain and her performance will be poor. The other might imagine it as the experience of a lifetime for her to go out and enjoy - she might feel liberated and relaxed and her play is likely to reflect these emotions. The same event evokes two different responses which result in two very different performances. The message here is very simple - learn how to change your interpretations and you learn how to manage your emotions. When you can manage your emotions you can perform at your best.

