

Learning from losing: An on-going path to an improve performance

When we win, we feel euphoric; we are super enthusiastic and cannot wait to tell our friends and family of our latest achievement. We relive our achievement as if it is still happening; we re-tell that magic drop shot, the timely lob, and the incredible backhand that won the match. It is surely a wonderful feeling and one that we wish could experience with more frequency. However, the reality is winning happens less often than we wish.

When we lose, we feel devastated. All expectations to achieve our goals go down the drain despite having put so much time and effort to perform well. A squash player that is part of a team may feel the additional pressure of having let his/her teammates down. There may be tears, anger, and frustration. Although these feelings are normal, the key rests in learning from a losing experience in order to elevate one's performance for the next game.

In my experience, the greatest lessons come when we take a serious look at losing. Not that I want you to lose, but rather to pay closer attention to our emotional and behavioral approach to losing. It is very understandable not to be emotionally derailed when we lose. It takes a strong conscientious effort to manage upsetting emotions. On the other hand, it is also understandable that whatever our losing pattern is the stronger will it become with each successive loss.



Whether we react in a positive or negative way, we are slowly, but surely building behavioral patterns. Maybe when we were younger we reacted to a loss showing inwardly anger emotions; we kept ourselves together and kept playing and still put a strong effort. As the loss experiences increase, we are finding that we have even less of an ability to manage our upsetting emotions. In fact, we may find ourselves emotionally quitting or feeling deflated. What started as a fun game to play, the difficulty to manage our emotions is causing to play squash with less enthusiasm or frequency. When we combine the difficulty to manage upsetting losing emotions to the pressure of wanting to do well, young talents see squash not so much as a fun activity, but rather as a job. And, when we get to this point, it is quite difficult to reverse it. As a consequence and unfortunately, all that effort and sacrifice to do well is washed away.

Given that losing is part of a competitive experience, changing the way to look at losing will most likely help us to achieve our goals and become mentally strong players and individuals. So, as difficult and challenging it might be, here are three habits that will help you ingrain more productive responses:

1. Accept you have lost. Losing is and will be unavoidable!!! As Blanchard said, “humility does not mean you think less of yourself. It means you think of yourself less.” When we lose, it appears as if the entire world is collapsing before our eyes. Instead, take a proactive stand and take a few breaths and start to subtract seven backwards from 100. Acceptance will help you to learn from such an upsetting experience and help you use it for the better on the next occasion.
2. Once I emotionally accept my loss, I am accepting that winning is difficult. We lose to players who we are supposed to beat and to those who are better than us. Perseverance and consistency will help you attain your goals. You may realize that you need to change the way you practice, how you mentally approach your game, and/or to improve your physical endurance. The challenge to move up and improve will require that you be outside your comfort zone. Roger Federer once said, “gain confidence with each win, and experience from each loss”.
3. Thirdly, ask yourself, what was the best point/experience you remember that can take home with you? Look at all that you did right; take in all the positive experiences. Regardless of what happened, take a constructive look at your game will hugely help you to learn from a losing experience. You will realize you did many more things right than what you had originally thought. It will boost your confidence.



As John Maxwell beautifully wrote, winning thinkers do not say, “sometime I win, sometimes I lose; instead, they say, sometimes I win and sometimes I learn.”

Hope these insights are useful!



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