

WHAT IS MENTAL TOUGHNESS?

By University of Illinois Coach Craig Tiley

1. THE 3 D'S: Discipline, Desire, Dedication

2. ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY AND NOT MAKING EXCUSES

Accept responsibility for yourself. If you're wrong, admit it, take the blame and get on with it. Don't dwell on the past. You can only change the present. Be responsible for others like your teammates. Don't waste your time and energy worrying about the score, the calls, your ranking, position in the line-up, etc. Focus instead on preparation and practice. The minute you start to complain, for example arguing a call, you lose your concentration and poise. Without these, you don't have a chance to win.

3. WINNING THE MENTAL BATTLE

There are times when you'd rather be elsewhere doing something more exciting, but we know that winners in life face up to the challenges at hand, while losers make up excuses to avoid them. You must work even harder when you're sick, hurt, sad, or troubled. That's toughness. Life is easy when the going is good. Mental toughness comes into play when the going gets bad. Toughness is also the ability to keep working towards a long-term goal, while going full-throttle to win the short-term battle.

4. SACRIFICE

"I was taught that everything is attainable if you are prepared to give up, to sacrifice, to get it. Whatever you want to do, you can do it if you want it badly enough, and I do believe that. I believe that if I wanted to run a mile in four minutes, I could do it. I would have to give up everything else in my life, but I could run a mile in four minutes. I believe that I could do anything I wanted but only if I am prepared to give up everything else in life." (Michael Johnson)

5. EXTRA EFFORT

A story is told of the famous cellist, Pablo Casals, who was to be interviewed by a young reporter at his studio. Casals kept the reporter waiting past the scheduled time. Throughout the wait, the reporter heard Casals' music coming through the studio's doors. Finally, the doors opened and Casals appeared. He realized he'd kept the young reporter waiting and apologized profusely.

"Oh, my young friend, I am so sorry to have kept you waiting. You see, I was practicing my cello all day, as I do every day, and I totally lost track of time. I forgot you were waiting."

The reporter jumped to his feet and said, "You are the world's greatest cellist, and you tell me that you have been in your studio practicing your cello all day and that you do that every day. Whatever for?"

Casals turned to the reporter and said, "Ah, my young friend, that is precisely why I practice my cello all day, every day...to remain the world's greatest cellist."

4 STEPS TO LEARNING TO BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

#1 Don't listen to the experts - Do not listen to anyone who tells you that you can't reach your goal. The only experts that you should listen to are those who support your dream, encourage you, and provide you with strategies to get there. In 1954 the "experts" said the human body could not run a mile under 4 minutes. Roger Bannister was successful in accomplishing his dream! The "Medical experts" said that females would harm their bodies and not be able to reproduce if they ran further than 800 yards at one time. Today, women compete in marathons and have children with no complications! For every dream there are hundreds of "experts" waiting in the wings to explain why that dream can't be realized.

#2 Eliminate words like "CAN'T, NEVER, and IMPOSSIBLE" - These words are self-limiting. Rip them out of the dictionary in your mind. When you use them on yourself you will hold yourself back. You don't know what is really possible in your life. Make a conscious effort on a daily basis to rid your vocabulary of this type of self-limiting language. If you do use a word like can't...then add yet in the sentence. For example "I can't do that yet." Remember, the language that you use on yourself directly effects your performance and whether or not you'll achieve your goals.

Positive self-talk is important in tennis. When you tell yourself "DO NOT double fault, your mind automatically hears double fault and more often than not, you double fault. A solution to this is positive self talk, tell your-self "Serve just like in practice, down the tee."

#3 Practice doing the impossible on a daily basis - There are two kinds of impossibilities: impossible impossibles and possible impossibles. The impossibles are flying like a bird, running faster than a speeding bullet, stopping a bus with your body, etc. These tasks are not physically possible to perform. However, you CAN practice the possible impossibles. These are things you THINK or KNOW that you can't do. For example, some people can't hit the tennis ball very hard, or hit a slice serve, some can't stay calm under pressure, or speak in front of a group. On a daily basis you want to begin to challenge those limiting beliefs and move towards accomplishing these tasks. Take one thing that you don't think you can't do, and work on it everyday. EVERY TIME YOU CHALLENGE YOUR LIMITING BELIEFS BY MOVING TOWARDS THEM, YOU WILL EXPAND THEM!

#4 Surround yourself with GO-FOR-IT people - You can expand your belief system by reading about or talking to other people who have done the "impossible". They will provide you with real life examples that anything is possible if you put your mind to it.