



The Mental Game of Tennis

Summary of Session #2

How mental approach and partner dynamics can influence performance just as much as strategy and technique. Key takeaways from the conversation:

Theme #1: Connection

Connection creates trust, and trust helps players compete with more confidence and less hesitation. Players tend to play more confidently when they feel supported by their partner, even after mistakes.

Find opportunities to connect with your partner before and during the match. Sometimes the smallest conversations can make the biggest difference. Before the match, consider asking your partner some of these questions:

“What do you need from me today?”

Does your partner want you to cover the baseline? Maybe she needs you to communicate during points – the easiest way to know what she needs it to ask her.

“What do you want to hear from me during the match?”

When I played with Mary, she asked me to remind her that she’s an athlete so she wouldn’t start babying the ball. When I played with Jen, I asked her to remind me to “keep my chin up” if I started hitting my serve into the net.

“What do you consider your strengths?”

You may be surprised with what you learn – maybe you never noticed that KC has an amazing return of serve down the alley, but specifically when she’s served down the “T”. Your partner’s answer can help you understand how to highlight what they do best.

Theme #2: Commitment

Great doubles players actively commit to being great partners, not just great individual players. Being a supportive partner is about more than encouragement and setting your partner up at the net – it’s also about protecting each other’s mindset.

Connected Energy

Remember that your mindset affects the person beside you. When a player appears frustrated or emotional, it can unintentionally force her partner to shift focus from strategy and execution to trying to rebuild confidence or manage emotions. That distraction can quickly impact momentum.

Communicate Confidence

We communicate confidence through our words, reactions, posture, and body language. Your partner (and opponents) notice everything – shoulders dropping, silence, frustration or negative reactions. Even when that frustration is directed at yourself, it still changes the energy on the court.

Compete as a Team

Strong doubles teams make a conscious effort to project resilience, stay connected, and move forward by creating a calm, confident environment that allows both players to stay focused on the next point.

Theme #3: Chemistry

Chemistry can be just as important as matching game styles. Creating chemistry doesn't have to be complicated - often shared routines and simple interactions help build chemistry with your partner.

Rituals between points

Tap racquets, point at each other, nod heads and other rituals help you stay engaged with each other

Tell your partner what she needs to hear

Reinforce her strengths and use the simple reminders she's already identified as helpful.

Use shared reminders

Sarah and Emily started using a shared reminder when playing together: "Watch the Seams" - a cue to focus on the seams of the ball and reset mentally after an error. Instead of saying "sorry" or "my bad," they simply say "WTS" and move on - a quick reset that keeps the focus on the next point.

Theme #4: Confidence

Confidence in doubles is rarely personal - it's shared. The way partners speak to each other, respond to mistakes, and carry themselves between points can either strengthen confidence or slowly chip away at it. Strong teams intentionally create confidence together - here are some of Peri's suggestions:

Sorry - REALLY - Not Sorry!

Before the match, agree with your partner to eliminate "sorry" from your communication. Saying sorry after missed shots doesn't build confidence or momentum.

What Went RIGHT?

After the match - instead of immediately focusing on what went wrong and how to fix it, spend time talking about what went right and how to bring more of those positives into the next match.

Confidence Without Complacency

At the same time, confidence should never turn into judgment about your opponents. One of the quickest ways to scramble your mindset is by convincing yourself that you're "better" than the team across the net. If you start losing, that belief can quickly spiral into frustration and panic. Instead, treat every team as a worthy competitor - there's a reason they're competing at this level. Respecting your opponents helps keep you and your partner grounded, confident, and focused.

Momentum Shifts

Momentum shifts happen and confidence often shifts with them. In these moments, trust your game and avoid creating additional pressure for yourself or your partner. How? Several players emphasized simplifying communication during tense moments. Instead of over-coaching or focusing on mistakes, use short, calming phrases that help both partners reset and focus on the next point. A few recommendations included: "Trust your game" - "One point at a time" - "We've got this."

Confidence ≠ Perfection

Confidence is not pretending you'll never miss. Confidence is trusting that you can recover from the miss, reset, and compete on the very next point.

Above All Else: Have Fun!

Competing matters, but so does connecting with your partner, enjoying a beautiful day, and remembering why we play in the first place - because we love the game of tennis! Having fun on the court creates freedom, relaxes pressure, and helps bring out the best tennis in both partners.