

TENNIS WITH GOOD ATTITUDE!

BY ANNE-MARIE NEWLAND

The statement “**YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS!**” was the first time I ever showed any interest at all in tennis! Wow, who was this guy? What a bad attitude, cool! You must understand I was the tender age of 22 at time. I was a late developer when it came to rebelling!

John McEnroe fired a lot of passion into his tennis and that grabbed the British nation having never witnessed BAD BEHAVIOUR out there on the tennis court in such an explosive way! Back in the 70's things were exploding everywhere, socially, sexually, musically and there too on the tennis court.

I like to believe that that was the day that athletes became acutely aware of the media and the power of the spectator. They lift you high and then they drop you. They love you. They hate you.

I saw the battle and ultimate success of John very much like the Gladiator who must win to survive. I am more than sure that McEnroe felt the same.

The question is could he have succeeded without the passion? Yes I am sure he could but for him it was about the RISK OF RELEASING WILD CHILD WITHIN.

We all have that wild child within, I like my wild child. It is she who makes me spark, she who throws passion onto my yoga, my four children and football! It is her crazy eye that sees more than the body but the story inside; it is how I connect. But there are times she has pushed me so far to the edge I have been in danger of destroying the very things I love and live for.

So it still comes down to control. We can have it all, maybe, if we harness the senses and the wild horse called MIND.

As a yogi I have learned to apply my breath to control the mind. Pushing all other thoughts gently away and focusing on inhaling and exhaling. It takes a long time of practice to discipline the mind/breath but the results are astounding.

The practice of Pranayama, the control of the life force (breath) is a tiny miracle performed every second of the day. Apply this to the discipline of muscular and skeletal control and you have all you need to defend and protect and challenge.

A human being that is a whole, divine instrument is capable of anything.

For John back there in the 70's he lost it. When he lost that control and cool the first time, his wild child was taking a hold and spending more time reeking havoc rather than creating and motivating genius.

If only I could have shown him the simple beauty of yoga. The way yoga is gentle and yet has a firm hand that if held will never let you go. You can still be a winner and still have the trappings of success and be able to hold onto your integrity and passion.

Lets look at the mind of a competitive athlete just before a big match.

Keeping the mind focused under the high pressure that is demanded of an athlete during competition is a hard task. Negativity is the big enemy. The mind likes to wander to the past. Most athletes during competition are not thinking about the present. They are thinking, " I lost to him last time and I may lose now." They wander to the future and think about the consequences of losing and the repercussions.

Most athletes think too much during competition and try too hard to control their movements. Worrying about the result, performance of a game and the outcome are a great hindrance to applying concentration. Athletes are always shocked when they analyze a match and asked their thoughts prior to playing, amazed that they had so many negative feelings during an important competition.

What a waste of energy. More energy is lost through negative thought than through physical exertion. Meditation is the key. Many athletes use styles of mental focus exercises to promote better concentration. As I always say to my footballers and rugby players there is nothing mystical or magical about meditation it is simple and free. Focusing the mind on one thing, breath, is meditation. SIMPLE.

YOU MUST CONTROL YOUR THOUGHTS OR THE THOUGHTS WILL CONTROL YOU!

Now apply this to training the body and you have it all. Adding yoga to enhance your training program on court will give you the winning edge. The tennis players training is usually not a balanced program as you will use the left or right hand to play, even if you manage to use both hands for a backhand. The game itself puts huge pressure on the shoulders and legs.

Athletes are aware that shoulder tension can and does have disastrous effect on the performance of sports skills. Shoulder tension is one of the key factors in producing a bad serve. When we are under stress we automatically tense our shoulders and the muscles contract. Therefore practicing the **downward dog (adho mukhasvanasana)** will for certain open and release the upper body and chest.

It has to be one of the best shoulder openers there is in yoga practice. It will also target other stress areas like the lower back and hamstrings. Stress, anxiety, emotional and physical fatigue (after training), will nearly always produce shoulder tension. Set out for yourself a specific series of yoga poses to help with this problem and add them to the end of your tennis training when you are warm!

For example.

- The dog pose (or downward facing dog). Adho mukha svanasana.
- The cobra (or upward facing dog). Bhujangasana.
- The shoulder stand. Sarvangasana.
- The bridge pose. Sethu Bandasana.
- The seated pose. Utkatasna.

I have added to many young tennis players regime the idea of total body relaxation. I suggest they find a quiet place and relax the whole body after training by using **Yoga Nidra**, yogic sleep. Close the eyes and breathe deeply into the diaphragm and allowing the mind to rest in the constant thought of breath. Young players are under acute pressure and stress to perform to keep their places in the ranks. Their minds are still pliable and this is the time to give them positive training and de-stressing skills.

Here are four poses that are a must for specific tennis negatives, like;

- **Tight hips.** Lunge poses. Parsvakonasana variations, all are deep hip openers.
- **Tight chest and shoulders.** Extended Tadasana, mountain pose to wake up the lungs and to help breathe deeply, as well as to open shoulders.
- **Ankle weakness and more power to the legs.** The Garuda. Eagle pose. This will allow the muscles around the ankle to lift and lock. Make sure you actively engage the muscles around the ankle and release when the ankle starts to ache. The legs are being squeezed together here and as you bend the legs even deeper they have to work very hard indeed. Balance is the other key factor here for the promotion of mental power and focus.
- **Weak wrists and arms.** The handstand. Adho mukha vrksasana. This pose is not only great fun to do but challenges the balance between harmoniously developing the mental and physical focus achieving great agility. It strengthens the wrists and arms too as well as expanding the chest.

The main idiom here is that greater mental focus and deep muscle flexibility keeps you free of injury and gives you fitness on an all-body/mind level. I wish I could my hands on Tim Henman and Greg Ruzedski! Good Luck British players this Wimbledon 2003.

Anne-Marie has 2 videos out. One is sport specific, Yoga Dynamix for Sport. The other Power Yoga.

Both are available by logging onto
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