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The opinion of Romanian male tennis players about the importance of mental training

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the importance of mental preparation for competition in Romanian tennis players. We collected data from 67 Romanian male tennis players (mean age: 24 years) by means of questionnaires. Thus, we applied two questionnaires: a demographic test and SCAT - Sport Competition Anxiety Test. Data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics version 20.0. The results indicate four aspects of the analyze: who is in charge with the mental preparation, if the athletes know the modern technics used by the specialists for the mental training for competition, the opinion about necessity of mental training and some aspects of anxiety and the strategies to combat it. The conclusions indicate that the mental preparation under the supervision of a specialist is not high practiced by the Romanian tennis players. The need for a specialist is demanded especially to control the emotions before the competition. The current practice to combat the anxiety is music listening, separation from the group, praying or respiration exercise. There is a largely need to improve this technics.

Key words: *coach, physical trainer, psychologist, anxiety, coping.*

Rezumat

Scopul acestei cercetări este analiza importanței pregătirii mentale pentru competiție pentru jucătorii de tenis seniori din România. Folosind metoda chestionarului, acesta s-a aplicat la un număr de 67 de jucători de tenis bărbați a căror vârstă medie este de 24 de ani. S-au aplicat două tipuri de chestionar, unul demografic iar cel de-al doilea a fost Testul pentru Verificarea Anxietății în Competițiile Sportive (SCAT). Analiza statistică a datelor a fost efectuată utilizând programul statistic SPSS, versiunea 20.0. Analiza rezultatelor indica patru aspecte: primul, privește persoana care se ocupă cu pregătirea mentală a sportivilor, al doilea aspect privește cunoașterea tehnicilor moderne folosite de către specialiști în pregătirea mentală a sportivilor pentru competiție, urmată de opinia cu privire la necesitatea pregătirii mentale la sportivii și în ultimul rând, unele aspecte cu privire la starea de anxietate și strategiile de combatere ale ei. Concluziile ne indică faptul că pregătirea mentală sub supravegherea unui specialist nu este foarte des practică de către tenismeni în România. Nevoia de specialist se observă la nivelul controlului emoțiilor din-naintea începerii competiției. Printre practicile curente se observă ascultarea muzicii, izolarea, practicarea rugăciunii sau exercitiile de respirație. Toate aceste tehnici necesită dezvoltare.

Cuvinte cheie: *antrenor, preparator fizic, psiholog, anxietate, strategii.*

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyze the importance of mental preparation for competition in Romanian tennis players.

Known as a professional sport, tennis is high developed in Romania with important results at junior and senior level.

The complete preparation for the competition includes among technical and physical preparation also the mental training. Supported financial only by parents at the beginning, the results of tennis players are important but not sustained by the national federation. In this situation, due to budget limits, not every athlete has included in his program the mental preparation.

Several studies revealed the effects of mental training program on pre-competitive anxiety, self-confidence and tennis performance in junior tennis players [1]. Moreover, it was assessed the presence of burn-out in competitive junior tennis players [2] or the strategies to build self-efficacy in tennis [3]. In this situation, the need for a mental preparation with a specialist is high demanded and not everyone can help the athlete to resolve the different problems (anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, etc.) In this paper we intend to analyze the situation in Romanian tennis, to see how the players prepare the competition, if there is a support from a psychologist. We also want to find out if the players know the principal technics used by the specialists for the mental preparation.

Material and methods

We collected data from 67 Romanian male tennis players during three competitions organized in Romania. From the total of 67 players, 23 are ATP classified and the age average is 24 years. We applied two questionnaires: demographic and the SCAT - Sport Competition Anxiety Test [4].

Demographic questionnaire contains 12 items. The questions focused on age, ATP position or non-classification, mental preparation, psychological technics used.

Sport Competition Anxiety Test contains 15 items, 10 of them measure the symptoms associated with anxiety. The five items that are not scored are designed to reduce the likelihood of an internal response-set bias. The standard instructions of the

SCAT ask respondents to indicate how they “usually feel when competing in sports and games.” We replaced the “sports and games with tennis”.

On a 3-point scale (1 = hardly ever, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often) respondents indicated the frequency with which they generally experienced the 10 anxiety related symptoms. The scores for the 10 items are summed to provide an overall measure of CTA, with a high composite score (as opposed to a low composite score) reflecting a greater tendency to experience competitive anxiety.

Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS Statistics version 20.0.

Results

a. Mental preparation

As we observed from the table no.1, from the total of 67 male tennis players questioned, only 32.8 % of them are doing the mental preparation with a specialist (psychologist). Generally, the coach is the person who motivates the athlete for the competition with his personal means and knowledge (50.7 %). Also, 7.5 % of the physical trainer are involved in mental preparation of the tennis player and 9 % of them are declaring that they are not mental prepared for the competition by somebody (specialist or non-specialist).

Table I. Who is the mental coach

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Coach	34	50.7	50.7	50.7
Physical trainer	5	7.5	7.5	58.2
Psychologist	22	32.8	32.8	91
Nobody	6	9.0	9.0	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

b. Types of mental preparation

They are different types of the mental preparation that the specialists are using in order to prepare the athlete for the competition. These are: autosuggestion, hypnosis, sophrology, NLP (neurolinguistics programming), imagery and behavioral technics or relaxation technics (Jacobson and Schultz).

As we see in the table no. 2, 55.2 % of athletes surveyed believes that autosuggestion can help largely psychological preparation, 16.4 % think that it helps very much, 25.4 % are not confident in this technique while 1.5% consider that this technique help them little and very little.

Table II. Tennis players who practice autosuggestion

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Strongly disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	3
Neither agree or disagree	1.7	25.4	25.4	28.4
Agree	37	55.2	55.2	83.6
Strongly agree	11	16.4	16.4	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

In table no. 3 we observed that 47.8 % of athletes surveyed believe that hypnosis can help them in achieving performance in a very small extent, 29.9 % consider that helps in small extent and 19.4 % are not confident in the technique.

Table III. Tennis players who practice hypnosis

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Strongly disagree	32	47.8	47.8	47.8
Disagree	20	29.9	29.9	77.6
Neither agree or disagree	13	19.4	19.4	97.0
Strongly agree	2	3.0	3.0	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

Concerning to sophrology, the athletes do not believe that this technique can help them (40.3 %), 29.9 % consider that only in a very small extent; 20.9 % consider neither disagree or agree, only 7.5 % are agree and 1.5 % are totally agree (table no 4).

Table IV. Tennis players who practice sophrology

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Strongly disagree	27	40.3	40.3	40.3
Disagree	20	29.9	29.9	70.1
Neither agree or disagree	14	20.9	20.9	91.0

Agree	5	7.5	7.5	98.5
Strongly agree	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

41.8 % of respondents believe that mental imagery helps in getting performance; largely 28.4 % think it helps very much, 14.9 % believe that it helps small extent whereas 11.9 % are not confident in the benefits of this technique (table no. 5).

Table V. Tennis players who practice imagery

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Strongly disagree	2	3.0	3.0	3.0
Disagree	10	14.9	14.9	17.9
Neither agree or disagree	8	11.9	11.9	29.9
Agree	28	41.8	41.8	71.6
Strongly agree	19	28.4	28.4	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

Table no. 6 reveals that 35.8 % of athletes believe that neuro - linguistic can help greatly to achieve performance and 31.3 % are very confident in this technique, only 4.5 % recognize its positive effects.

Table VI. Tennis players who practice NLP

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Strongly disagree	5	7.5	7.5	7.5
Disagree	14	20.9	20.9	28.4
Neither agree or disagree	21	31.3	31.3	59.7
Agree	24	35.8	35.8	95.5
Strongly agree	3	4.5	4.5	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

Behavioral technics are agreed largely by 43.3 % of tennis players, 11.9 % think that it helps very much; 34.3 % are not confident in the technique while 7.5 % and 3% do not believe in the benefits of this technique (table no. 7).

Table VII. Tennis players who practice behavioral techniques

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Strongly disagree	2	3.0	3.0	3.0
Disagree	5	7.5	7.5	10.4
Neither agree or disagree	23	34.3	34.3	44.8
Agree	29	43.3	43.3	88.1
Strongly agree	8	11.9	11.9	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

71.6 % of respondents believe that the goal setting techniques helps heavily in getting performances, 25.4 % consider that helps greatly while only 3% are distrustful of this technique (table no.8).

Table VIII. Tennis players who practice goal settings

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Neither agree or disagree	2	3.0	3.0	3.0
Agree	17	25.4	25.4	28.4
Strongly agree	48	71.6	71.6	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

44.8 % of athletes surveyed are not confident that Jacobson relaxation technique can help in getting performance, 32.8 % think that this technique can help them largely; 6% see heavily benefits of this relaxation techniques while 10.4% of them are disagree with this method; 6% of tennis players are strongly disagree (table no. 9).

Table IX. Tennis players who practice Jacobson

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Strongly disagree	4	6.0	6.0	6.0
Disagree	7	10.4	10.4	16.4
Neither agree or disagree	30	44.8	44.8	61.2
Agree	22	32.8	32.8	94.0
Strongly agree	4	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

47.8 % of respondents are not confident in the this relaxation technique (Schultz); only 25.4 % consider that helps greatly in getting performance, while 13.4 % and 10.4 % think that there are not or very little help (table no. 10).

Table X. Tennis players who practice Schultz

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Strongly disagree	7	10.4	10.4	10.4
Disagree	9	13.4	13.4	23.9
Neither agree or disagree	32	47.8	47.8	71.6
Agree	17	25.4	25.4	97.0
Strongly agree	2	3.0	3.0	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

c. Affirmations about the mental preparation

95.5 % of respondents considered true the athletes claim that psychological preparation can be understood as an absolutely necessary preparation method of each sport, while a small percentage of 1.5 % believe that psychological preparation is important in preparing athletes (table no.11).

Table XI. The need for mental preparation

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
True	64	95.5	95.5	95.5
False	1	1.5	1.5	97.0
I don't know	2	3.0	3.0	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

97 % of athletes surveyed consider as true the fact that the psychological preparation can transfer knowledge, skills and attitudes of a person with experience (psychologist) to one with less experience (athlete) while 3% do not know whether this statement is true or false (table no. 12).

Table XII. The transfer of knowledge, abilities and attitudes

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
True	65	97.0	97.0	97.0
I don't know	2	3.0	3.0	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

91% of athletes surveyed believe the false claim that only people with mental health problems turn to a psychologist, 3% believes true this affirmation while 6% do not know whether it is true or false (table no. 13).

40.3 % of athletes surveyed believe false statement that psychological preparation is perceived negatively in Romania, 28.4 % think this statement is true while 31.3% do not know whether psychological preparation is perceived negatively or positively in Romania (table no. 14).

Table XIII. About the psychological problems

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
True	2	3.0	3.0	3.0
False	61	91.0	91.0	94.0
I don't know	4	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

Table XIV. Negative perceptions

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
True	19	28.4	28.4	28.4
False	27	40.3	40.3	68.7
I don't know	21	31.3	31.3	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

d. Anxiety and competition

The results of SCAT indicate that 64.2 % of the tennis players has a moderate level of anxiety, 23.9 % has a low level while 11.9 % of them present a high level of anxiety (table no. 15).

Table XV. SCAT

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Low level of anxiety	16	23.9	23.9	23.9
Moderate level of anxiety	43	64.2	64.2	88.1
High level of anxiety	8	11.9	11.9	100.0
Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

We correlate the SCAT with the age and there are no significant correlations between them (table no. 16) and we can conclude that the problem of anxiety is not linked with the age/experience.

As we can observe in table no. 17, the tennis player believes that a sport psychologist will help them to control the emotions before the competition (47.5%). Moreover, 16.9% of the players said that this intervention help them to love competitions and also to better known themselves. A small percent need to learn how to win (11.9%) or to lose (6.8 %).

Table XVI. Correlation Age-SCAT

	Age	SCAT
Age	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.324
	N	67
SCAT	Pearson Correlation	-.122
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.324
	N	67

Table XVII. The need for a specialist

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
To win	7	10.4	11.9	11.9
To accept the defeat	4	6.0	6.8	18.6
To control the emotions	28	41.8	47.5	66.1
To like the competition	10	14.9	16.9	83.1
Better know myself	10	14.9	16.9	100.0
Total	59	88.1	100.0	
Missing System	8	11.9		
Total	67	100.0		

We also were interested to know how the athletes cope with the anxiety before the competition and we find out (table no. 18) that 37.5 % of them are listening music; others (25%) are praying or staying away from the group (25%). Some of them (12.5%) are practicing breathing exercise.

Table XVIII. Cope with anxiety

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumul. Percent
Praying	2	3.0	25.0	25.0
Separation from others	2	3.0	25.0	50.0
Listening music	3	4.5	37.5	87.5
Respiration exercises	1	1.5	12.5	100.0
Total	8	11.9	100.0	

Legend: Freq.= Frequency, Cumul.= Cumulative

Discussions

As we can observe from the questions analyzed, the tennis players are not mental prepared for the competition by a specialist. The reason can be the lack of specialist in sport psychology in Romania, the limits of the financial support but sometimes also the mentalities. Generally, the main preparation is limited at technical and physical and is organized by the coach and the physical trainer who accomplish sometimes the role of mental preparation.

The principal techniques used by the specialists in mental preparation are not very known by the tennis players (for example: hypnosis, NLP or sophrology). The common techniques such as autosuggestion, goal settings and imagery are better appreciated by the respondents but not because they are using them, just because they can have an idea

about them. The relaxation techniques Schultz and Jacobson are known and used in Romanian sport since the '80 but today, even if there are more others techniques developed, those seem to be also unknown and less practiced by the tennis players as a consequence of the preparation without specialist in sport psychology.

Conclusions

We can observe that the mental preparation under the supervision of a specialist is not high practiced by the Romanian tennis players. The need for a specialist is demanded especially to control the emotions before the competition. The current practice to combat the anxiety is music listening, separation from the group, praying or respiration exercise. There is a largely need to improve these techniques.

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