

GENERAL TENNIS PSYCHOLOGY.

Tennis psychology is nothing more than understanding the workings of your opponent's mind, and gauging the effect of your own game on his mental viewpoint, and understanding the mental effects resulting from the various external causes on your own mind. You cannot be a successful psychologist of others without first understanding your own mental processes, you must study the effect on yourself of the same happening under different circumstances. You react differently in different moods and under different conditions. You must realize the effect on your game of the resulting irritation, pleasure, confusion, or whatever form your reaction takes. Does it increase your efficiency? If so, strive for it, but never give it to your opponent.

Does it deprive you of concentration? If so, either remove the cause, or if that is not possible strive to ignore it.

Once you have judged accurately your own reaction to conditions, study your opponents, to decide their temperaments. Like temperaments react similarly, and you may judge men of your own type by yourself. Opposite temperaments you must seek to compare with people whose reactions you know.

A person who can control his own mental processes stands an excellent chance of reading those of another, for the human mind works along definite lines of thought, and can be studied. One can only control one's, mental processes after carefully studying them.

A steady phlegmatic baseline player is seldom a keen thinker. If he was he would not adhere to the baseline.

The physical appearance of a man is usually a pretty clear index to his type of mind. The stolid, easy-going man, who usually advocates the baseline game, does so because he hates to stir up his torpid mind to think out a safe method of reaching the net. There is the other type of baseline player, who prefers to remain on the back of the court while directing an attack intended to break up your game. He is a very dangerous player, and a deep, keen thinking antagonist. He achieves his results by mixing up his length and direction, and worrying you with the variety of his game. He is a good psychologist. The first type of player mentioned merely hits the ball with little idea of what he is doing, while the latter always has a definite plan and adheres to it. The hard-hitting, erratic, net-rushing player is a creature of impulse. There is no real system to his attack, no understanding of your game. He will make brilliant coups on the spur of the moment, largely by instinct; but there is no, mental power of consistent thinking. It is an interesting, fascinating type.

The dangerous man is the player who mixes his style from back to fore court at the direction of an ever-alert mind. This is the man to study and learn from. He is a player with a definite purpose. A player who has an answer to every query you propound him in your game. He is the most subtle antagonist in the world. He is of the school of Brookes. Second only to him is the man of dogged determination that sets his mind on one plan and adheres to it, bitterly, fiercely fighting to the end, with never a thought of change. He is the man whose psychology is easy to understand, but whose mental viewpoint is hard to upset, for he never allows himself to think of anything except the business at hand. This man is your Johnston or your Wilding. I respect the mental capacity of Brookes more, but I admire the tenacity of purpose of Johnston.

Pick out your type from your own mental processes, and then work out your game along the lines best suited to you.

When two men are, in the same class, as regards stroke equipment, the determining factor in any given match is the mental viewpoint. Luck, so-called, is often grasping the psychological value of a break in the game, and turning it to your own account.

We hear a great deal about the "shots we have made." Few realize the importance of the "shots we have missed." The science of missing shots is as important as that of making them, and at times a miss by an inch is of more value than a return that is killed by your opponent.

Let me explain. A player drives you far out of court with an angle-shot. You run hard to it, and reaching, drive it hard and fast down the side-line, missing it by an inch. Your opponent is surprised and shaken, realizing that your shot might as well have gone in as out. He will expect you to try it again, and will not take the risk next time. He will try to play the ball, and may fall into error. You have thus taken some of your opponent's confidence, and increased his chance of error, all by a miss.

If you had merely popped back that return, and it had been killed, your opponent would have felt increasingly confident of your inability to get the ball out of his reach, while you would merely have been winded without result.

Let us suppose you made the shot down the sideline. It was a seemingly impossible get. First it amounts to TWO points in that it took one away from your opponent that should have been his and gave you one you ought never to have had. It also worries your opponent, as he feels he has thrown away a big chance.

The psychology of a tennis match is very interesting, but easily understandable.

Both men start with equal chances. Once one man establishes a real lead, his confidence goes up, while his opponent worries, and his mental viewpoint becomes poor. The sole object of the first man is to hold his lead, thus holding his confidence. If the second player pulls even or draws ahead, the inevitable reaction occurs with even a greater contrast in psychology. There is the natural confidence of the leader now with the second man as well as that great stimulus of having turned seeming defeat into probable victory. The reverse in the case of the first player is apt to hopelessly destroy his game, and collapse follows.