

Developing Your High Performance Program Culture with Coach Dave Licker

- [00:00](#) Hi, I'm Mackie Macdonald, ATP tour player, and you're listening to compete like a champion
- [00:09](#) J: Welcome to compete like a champion podcast. You're here with Dr. Larry Lauer, mental skills specialist, and coach Johnny Parkes with USTA player development. Today we've got a special guest on the podcast is going to give us a great insight into how to develop a program. And um, Dave Licker. You're there?
- [00:29](#) D: I am here. Thank you for having me on
- [00:31](#) J: Awesome. Thanks for joining us. Now you are the junior Academy director of lakes tennis out in Frisco, Texas.
- [00:38](#) D: Yeah, I am.
- [00:38](#) J: Um, and not only that, you do many, many things, wear many hats. First of all, just to go through some of your accolades as a coach. Your USPTA highest level of USPTA certified, your USTA high performance coaching program graduate, you were formally the director of junior development for Fretz tennis center from '99 to '04 and the director of high performance for [inaudible], uh, from '04 to '11. You are the chairman of the Texas coaches commission and you're also one of our USTA, Team USA faculty coaches that helps execute team USA camp opportunities around the country. Got some things down here. So some of the players that you've helped develop, you've helped develop many, many division one players on the female and the male side. You've had many juniors competing in grand slams and you're currently heading up your program as well as working with, with Mitch, right?
- [01:28](#) D: Yes. Yes. I have two pros. I work with Mitch Krueger and then I have a girl named Gabriela Talaba who's about 300 WTA.
- [01:36](#) J: Great, great.
- [01:37](#) L: Just watched her play recently. We'll talk later, Dave.
- [01:42](#) D: Alright. Nice one-hander.
- [01:42](#) L: Yeah. Yes. Very much so.
- [01:45](#) J: So Dave, so on top of that, I mean what we thought is this year, your program, you've done absolute phenomenal jobs since joining Lakes and this year and very well deservedly your program won Team USA Developmental Program of the Year. Very well deserved. I mean and the list of accolades here from the past year is unbelievable. You've had over 35 players in nationals and Hardcourts, 35

different players in clays and and so you have a lot of players you're working with competing at the top level of the USTA junior ranks. You have players competing in the grand slams this year. One player in particular, one Wimbledon dubs, very impressive. And then of course, as you just mentioned, you're working with, uh, with two players. So what really comes to mind there is you're literally working along the whole pipeline from the base to the top. And so I thought it would be great for you to maybe, great for you to give us a background into your past positions and those experiences and how that's helped formulate the coach you are today.

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D: Well, I mean when I started off coaching at Fretz tennis center, I was kinda really in charge of the lowest level, you know, the like just beginning tournament player. And so I really had to, and then that when I first started coaching, I was very hungry to learn how to coach. So I did lot of education stuff with USPTA, USPTR, um, USTA high performance to really like, you know, learn how to coach, learn how I knew when I was that age, you know, when stuff didn't look right, but I didn't know how to fix it. So I really had to, you know, really do a lot of research, a lot of education on technique, on just different things like that. So that was my first series of coaching was really, you know, super low foundational coaching. And then as I got into T Bar M, when I got there I had, I became the director of high performance. I started, you know, working a little more with like, you know, lower level national players and then working my way up to upper level national players. And then by my end, when I was there after four years I had, you know, two guys playing grand slams and juniors. And so, you know, I mean just being around different coaches, when you start going to nationals, when you start going to international tournaments, start talking to a bunch of different coaches, networking, you can just learn so much. And so just being in the field all the time and being around all those other coaches, you just, you soak it all in, you just learn a ton.

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J: That's awesome. Who would you say have been some of your major influences whether it be in tennis or outside of tennis influences?

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D: I mean, I would say when I first started coaching and then you know my really low foundation has to do with my junior development coach, which is Jack Newman who is the, the owner of Austin Tennis Academy now. He was my coach at Fretz tennis center growing up and he really taught me like hard work, dedication, commitment to the sport, just all the, the things that it takes to be a really good player. And when I started coaching, I just kinda, you know, that's, that's what I knew. I knew how to work hard. I knew how to commit myself to the amount of time. I knew how to sacrifice, you know, different things, early mornings, late evenings to coaching and education and just different things. I learned how to work hard through him. So he has, he had the most influence on my, on who I am as a person, as an adult, besides my parents obviously. So that's how I started there. As I got a little bit more into the coaching stuff I would say Brad Stein is, is one who's influenced me a lot on the coaching side at the super high performance side. He currently works with Kevin Anderson. He's, you know, dallying with, with Bjorn a little bit. He helps me out with Mitch a ton.

So I would say Brad, you know, just, he was traveling with a couple of guys that were at that time, after Jim Courier was done, and it's before now, before he went to USTA. And so he was traveling with some juniors and you know, one of them was playing doubles with one of my players and we just, you know, we got to know each other really well. And for three years we traveled the junior tour together a little bit and you know, I got to learn a lot from him.

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J: That's awesome. So how would you say that their influences combine with your experiences that you've gained? How's that help formulate your philosophy and I guess what is your teaching and coaching philosophy?

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D: I mean, my philosophy coaching and teaching has to do with obviously a super strong foundation with technical development. Also, you know, what we kind of talk about here at Lakes is the triangle between tennis, which is, you know, your strokes or technical development, your skillset, your athletic development, and then the foundation of the bottom of the triangle is your competitiveness and mental toughness. And you know, obviously when you're competitive or just mental toughness breakdown, everything falls. So trying to really understand how to formulate a player with all different sides of that triangle, you know, the tennis techniques, skills development, the athleticism through athletic performance, athletic development, and then really talking to kids about competing, competing and mental toughness, which is, you know, we, I learned a lot from Larry all the time about that.

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L: Well, speak of the devil, I'm here, Dave. Appreciate that. Uh, and by the way, you've, you finally made it, even though all those accolades Johnny reeled off, you now are on the podcast, so you can feel like you've made it. But in all seriousness, you know, I, I've talked to you many times and I know you're a big proponent of mental training and the mental side. I guess before you even get into that, I was curious about, you're talking about holistic development of the whole athlete and looking at all the parts. How do you as a coach determine what is the core issue that a player might be dealing with when you have to look at all those different parts, right? Cause you could focus on technique, you could focus on tactics, you could focus on physicality and movement than strength. And, and then you could focus on the mind where, how do you sort of work through that, uh, being a coach for a number of years now?

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D: Yeah. I mean, when you're getting someone from the ground up, like I started working with Mitchell Krueger when he was 10 years old. So you're really dealing with every part of that all the time. But when you get players that young 11-10, 11-12 and you have them until they're about 18 or even Mitch is 25 you have to work on every single part of that. You, you, you learn how to focus on one part for a little while and then the other parts kinda like they don't quite get the attention they need, but then you do have to come back and really work on those and you, you, you do have to focus on all those throughout their career or else something's gonna really lack. To me, obviously when they're younger, the foundation of stroke development, skill development, competitiveness are super important to kids. Hopefully they came from other sports that we started

coaching. Mitch was a good baseball player, played a little bit of basketball but mostly baseball. So he was a good, he was a decent athlete. You know, we didn't have to do as much of that when he was younger, the athletic development, cause he already had a lot of that, you know, but you just kinda, you kind of analyze a player and each, each player is different and you figure out where they're weakest that they come to us or we get there. They're technically pretty sound. We work a little less on that. If their movements really off, work a little bit on movement. It's just, you know, you have to, you have to observe the player and kind of see where they need the most work and you spend the most time there but still keep, keep developing the other areas at the same time but maybe not as, as rapidly as the area that has the most problems.

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L: And how, Dave, does it benefit you to, to work throughout the pipeline from the young ones up to even to pros. Does that benefit the work that you do at the youngest levels and as you talk about developing the whole player and not missing out on any of those parts as they're growing and maturing?

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D: Yeah, definitely. I think, you know, one of, one of the strengths that we have here is that I do, I have worked in every part of it and I feel like that'll help me like with Mitch, we changed his forehand grip, uh, last year in November. So I had to go, we had to go back to developmental one-on-one on the forehand. You know, I even think the pros sometimes when they're tweaking things or needs to work on stuff, you can overlook something that developmentally might be a little off on it and just proper technique. And that's, that's development. So even when you're, you know what, when you're working on the basics, you never leave that. And I actually talked to Brad about that a while back and one of the things he felt like helped him as a coach now is that he did have to go back and work on that stuff. He did work at an Academy that he started and had to go back and, and work on some basic stuff and that he feels like that's really helped him with Kevin a lot. I feel like that's helped me with some of the pros that I worked on because it's really the same things just at a higher rate of speed.

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L: So do you feel that, you know, being around the pros, does that inform from maybe from even from a tactical side or a mental side what you might do with the younger ones?

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D: Yes, definitely. It lets you see like the future of what tennis is doing besides, I mean obviously TV is TV, but when you go live, when I'm, when I'm with the pros, whether it being Indian Wells, US Open, French Open Wimbledon, you see what a Jannik Sinner looks like, who's 17,18 years old, who's one of the top, you know, he's top 100 now. But I, I saw him go from like 215 to top 100 in like six months. And you just knew when he was 200 something that the guy was going to be really good and you just know. And so you look at him and you see what the future of tennis is going to look like at that age. And you see like, I mean when everything's that fast and it slows down, you get a good sense of what people are missing at a lower level, in my opinion.

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J: That's a, that's a great point. So how would you say that you incorporate the mental, the mental skills, the mental performance training along the different stages of, of uh, and different levels of players you're working with, so going from the, you know, your 12 and unders through to your pros. How do you ingrain that into your programming for the kids to benefit from that?

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D: Well, when they're younger, it's more generalized mental training where you talk about your rituals, you talk about, you know, whether it being Jim Lehrer sports stages or any different types of rituals that you have. We talk about professionalism at a certain age, what it looks like, and then we just look at their practice habits, I mean too. To me, you can learn so much about a kid's mental toughness skills by their practice habits. If they're, you know, do they run down every ball? How resilient are they when they're doing a drill and they've got to get 10 in a row and they miss nine, how frustrated do they get? Or do they get right back on it real fast? How fast does someone put a ball back in play as soon as they miss? When they're really young, you're trying to ingrain these super tough practice habits on these kids. That way it builds their mental toughness. You build resiliency that way. You know, my job, you know, is not just to talk about resiliency at that age, but really to try to develop it. And so we talk about even, you know, when you're going playing nationals or whether it's sectionals and you have the back draw now and you know, you've got to like jump back out on a match as soon as you just lost the main draw match and you've got to be resilient and play again. So even at 11-12 when you have backdrop matches, you have to be resilient. And you know, our job at this age, you know, but you know from 10 up until a certain age is, is to foundationally get them to be resilient. It's not just talking about it, it's actually building it through a process. And you know, when they're younger we do it through backdraws, we do it through practice habits and we do it through generalized mental training as far as like, you know, your, your rituals like I talked about. As you get a little older, you see where they struggle at certain times, where they, it's a little more finite about where they're less resilient. It's a little more professional, here's the professionalism, you're, you're missing it at 16, 17, 18. It just becomes a little more tailored to the individual and it becomes a little bit more uh, detailed to the individual.

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L: No, that's outstanding. And, and certainly you know, it, what you, what you're talking about there is really exposing the athletes to situations in practice and, and then shining a light on the mental side. And I think it's a, it's an aspect that many coaches miss that you can, you can really work on, like you're saying Dave, on resilience and the mental side, right? Actually you're, you're, you're not doing your player their full justice if you're not, right, because you're not preparing.

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D: You're not working on that side of the game. Exactly. I mean, our job is to make these kids tougher. Mental toughness is toughness to me. You gotta, you gotta get tougher. And so, you know, our job is to help them with that and cultivate that. Some kids are naturally better at it than others. Some kids, I mean, we got to put them through the ringer. We gotta be really hard on them.

We gotta be, we gotta tell them when they, when they mess up in a little tougher voice with that aspect, we've got a, you know what I mean? They, it, it, it's not who they are. And so we have to kind of get them that way a little bit more. And so that, that's training. That's our job.

[14:04](#)

L: How challenging is it Dave to work with a kid who maybe isn't bringing that, what you call quote unquote mental toughness to the court when you get them when they're young to try to ingrain? Does that take some time and is it...

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D: I would say for me it's one of the most frustrating things, for me personally, because I'm very competitive and so for, to get players that aren't competitive is, I find that the most challenging thing for me to do personally because I don't really think like they think. So I've had to really like try to put myself in their shoes, like, okay, are they scared to compete? They come up with some, when I ask them questions, they come with some answers that I'm like, okay, I would never even thought about being scared about this and about that. And so that's why they're not competing. I had one girl who's very good and she, you know, every now and then she'd throw in a match, she wouldn't compete close to her best. And she's like, well, if I don't compete my best, and they really didn't beat me, I just lost. And I was like, Oh wow, I've never thought about that. You know? And so I try to, I try to ask a lot of questions. I'm, yes, I'm hard on the kids about being competitive, but I want to know how they think because maybe they don't think like me. And I've had to really learn how to adjust my thinking to the different types of kids and the different types of personalities because I'm a certain personality, a certain type and I don't know. I don't, I don't really understand not competing my best. That's just how I was brought up. And that's what my father called [inaudible], my parents did, and my coach did. And so I really didn't understand that. But that's, that's, that's, it's very challenging and you have to figure out ways to get these guys to, to compete their best. You know, cause at the end of the day everyone's got a good forehand, everyone's got a good backhand and you know the kid, the players that compete the hardest are the ones that ended up being the best players.

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L: No, I love to hear that because what you're talking about Dave, is you're, you're adjusting your coaching to the player, right? And you do that by asking questions and getting to know them and instead of just saying, well I know what you're going through, let me ask you. You know, I think you sometimes get some very interesting responses from players when you ask, but that adds to your, your coaching knowledge and how to deal with people and in different ways. And I think it speaks to the idea that motivation or determination or any of these sort of mental toughness types of topics are more complex and either a player wants it or they don't. There are a lot of other factors that are involved.

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D: And when they don't, how do you get them to want it? That's the key.

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L: Well, every coach I've ever met wants to know the answer to that question. Well, you know, you can't, you can't make anyone do anything. I mean at the end of the day, but they have to find a passion for that to find a love for it. And

to me that's not a conversation, that's exposure to the game and, and to competing and around people who love the game and are enthusiastic like yourself. So, and that's what you've done for a lot of players.

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D: Yeah. And then I tried to bring that same, you know, I'm lucky I have an unbelievably, I'll go back to my Academy, I have a great team and every coach is on board with the philosophy of, of those things. Everyone's very competitive. I've handpicked my coaches by people I knew in the past. I knew how they coached or, or how they played for me or they coached next to me. And I, you know, I try to get guys that are, you know, very similar to how I like to coach as far as competitiveness and, and trying to train these kids to be the best player they can be mentally, uh, not just tennis wise.

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J: And that's a great segue onto to talking a little bit more about the program that you have developed. Maybe not just this one but previous ones too. How have you gone about developing, I mean, you just talked about that bringing in your own guys and that's great, sorry your own people and that's great. How would you say the, uh, the probably, the keys to having a successful program and how would you define a successful program?

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D: I would say there's only, there's one key to having successful program and that's culture. What is the culture of your program? Is it, it depends on what your goals are. I mean there's some, there's some programs their, their, their goals are to have division three players and to, you know, there's nothing wrong with that. That's just the goals of their program. Obviously our program is to have division one if not professional players. That's, you know, that's, that's our goal. It's goals that I've set from the top. These are, this is what I want, you know, so I have to have guys that work that hard. I have to have coaches next to me that are willing to work and sacrifice as much as I have throughout the last couple of years, you know? But it's all about the culture. And what are the top goals? What are the goals from the top down and does everything fit into those goals? You know, when I was coaching at Fretz, I had a pretty successful state, I would say state ranked and, and lower level, national. I had a couple, I about five kids in that program that were ranked top 10 in the country. So they were pretty good. But not a lot of, not very many international players. One or two that dabbled with some international tournaments. I gained experience. But then a T Bar M, you know, we had, we had way more, we had, you know, 30 kids play national, something like that, a couple of years. We had a lot, we won a lot of gold, silver, bronze balls. We had two kids play junior grand slams. So we started, I started doing a lot of ITF travels or working with other kids that came into our program, you know, that started living with with me or another coach that were higher level players. And you know, it's, it's still about the culture and, and surrounding yourself with guys that make that culture strong all the time. So to me that's the number one key is the culture and do, do your goals, go along with the culture that you've set into place.

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L: And that's what I hear you saying, David. You're saying that you have to have goals down from the top and everybody has to be clear and understand what

those goals are. And then you hire and reward people that deliver on, on those things and who have a similar philosophy and understand how you're trying to get there. So it's set from the top. But then from the bottom, everybody's bought in and they know their role and they know the philosophy and they're living it out every day.

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D: Yeah. And I, I'm lucky the boss I have now, it goes totally, like, there's no misconception about our goals and he's totally on board. You have to have, you know, I mean if you own your own Academy, it's different. But I, I worked for somebody who owns our club and my goals have to be the same as as his because you know, if the club's goals are to have more members and my, my goals are to take more courts. Well there's a conflict of interest there. So you have to be in an area where it comes from even higher than even the director, it has to come from the owner even too.

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L: That's killed many a high performance program, hasn't it? Differences.

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J: It has.

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L: Certainly has.

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J: You could even talk about the coach needs to have the same goals as the player and doesn't, you know, because that's another thing that you've probably seen a lot, right Dave? Where the coach goes in and is like, I'm going to make the most of this player. This player I think can be a professional player and that's how I'm going to train them. But yet their goal may be to play college and they have no aspirations to want to play pro. So that, it doesn't affect the work that you're willing to put in for that player, but it does, it does affect the sort of, the conversations you have and the relationship part, I guess of the, of the development of that player. Because if you're talking in a language of professional tennis and your players talk in a language of collegiately, then you're not, you're not sort of singing the same song. So that may put a strain on it a little bit in terms of that, you know, push-pull I guess.

[21:23](#)

D: Yeah, you have to know exactly what the player wants. I mean really a kid, you know, to me, and most of the players get as good as they really want to be. If you get them young enough, they, they, they get as good as they really want to be. There's very few that, a lot of holding back, whether it's, you know, some of them, you know, players make excuses for this or they don't want to sacrifice that, you know, when they get to be 16 there's other interests in their life besides just tennis and they don't add a balance. But to me, a lot of the players, you know, I tell parents all the time, and usually your kid will get as good as they really want to be and if they really want to be a certain level in juniors and have a chance of playing professional tennis, they're going to have to do a lot to do that. And that's what that means. It doesn't mean they want to be a professional, but they're not willing to sacrifice it. So it's going to get there. No you have to, if they want to get there, they'll sacrifice those things and it won't even be a sacrifice. I mean I remember some kids I used to coach people ask

them, you know like, Hey, don't you miss going to senior prom, don't you miss doing this? And they're like, no, I'd rather be at Wimbledon. It's not a sacrifice for them to me like yeah, you have to understand what the player really wants, how good they really want to be and then you guys you have to be all be on the same page with their developmental plans and the language you speak to them as well too. And how you know really how hard you push them.

[22:34](#)

L: You, you bring me to a thought Dave, and that is when you said developmental plans and I think one of the toughest things or one of the largest obstacles would be when the player has a different vision of how they want to play, then the coach does and how does that get worked out? Is that, is that something that can be agreed upon or how do, how have you dealt with that? Because I think every coach that's been out there for a while has to figure out, you know, a player sees the game differently or sees their game differently and you see a vision that you're like, well actually, if you want to play, do you want, if you want to play pro, you need to play this way.

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D: Yeah. I mean it's a lot of conversations. You know, a lot of it, some of my individuals, especially with my girls, are mostly conversations than hitting balls because we talk about those things. Those are very, very important. I mean, some kids, they want to be told too much about what to do. They don't have enough of an opinion. You know? I have one girl where like I work with her and I tell her like, okay, you're never going to be mentally where I want you to be until you argue with me. You don't argue with me enough. I want you to argue. I actually want you to argue. Don't just like say, okay, okay. Okay. Okay. Because then you're going to be looking for me to tell you what to do. I actually want you to argue with me about how you're supposed to play. Let's have conversations about it. Not a one way conversation. I like it when players like we talk about how they're supposed to play. My job at a certain age with a player is to coach them out of a relationship, not out of authority. When they're younger it's a little more authority. Hey you're going to do this. Hey you're going to do that. Then as they get a little older you start talking a little bit more and it's like parenting in my opinion, coaching is like parenting. When you're young, you parent out of authority, when you get older you parent out of a relationship and you're still parenting and guiding the player. You just do it in different ways. And I think when when they get older you want to talk about it. Like you know, I had a talk with one of my 14 year old girls actually today in practice cause she was, she was starting to hit the ball too high and she's like, well I feel like I'm competing when I hit the ball this high and I can make more balls. I go, I understand that, but it's going a little too high. And I said, well, in professional tennis do do, do women usually hit lower or higher than that? And she goes, lower? I go, yeah. So if your goal is to play professional tennis someday, you need to get better at, get better at, your margin doesn't have to be so extreme. You know, we talked about that, cause that was actually a topic that she and I talked about this weekend at her tournament. I didn't go with her, but she, she was calling me all the time about different ways she was trying to play. And she's still trying to, she's 14 so she's really trying to figure out how she's supposed to play and we talk about it. I'm not going to tell her how she's

supposed to play. I want her to figure out, because to me the old saying, some is taught, most is caught. So like when she catches onto it by herself, she'll be able to run with it better than if I just tell her what she's supposed to do. But how they're supposed to play is super important, but as they get older, I try to guide them more than I tell them what to do because they have, they have to be on board with it 100% or else it's not going to work.

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J: And that's so, so awesome to hear cause I think that's one of the greatest challenges of coaches is taking them from dependence to independence and giving them a voice that they can ask questions and make decisions and be creative. Because all these go into the mix of how their brain thinks. If they are able to process and you're able to give them a platform by working with them and go through some of these questions and some of these challenges and you're taking them through that journey. Then but you said earlier, I mean practice doesn't make perfect, practice makes permanent. You're creating now habits of how they think, how they decide things, how they get through certain issues and that inevitably will translate to them when they're on the court. They're going to be faced with questions they ask themselves in the middle of a match, they're going to have to go to plan B or plan C and it's on them to think about that. Whereas if they're constantly waiting for the answer or to be told what to do from the coach, especially as they go through this journey, then really we're not setting them up for that permanent habit of being able to compete and fight and figure things out under high speeds and under high pressures of the competitors.

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D: Yes. Yeah. That's the major thing is that we're, our, our sport has to do with winning and losing matches based on one or two decisions as they get, as they get older and get better at tennis, the matches are decided by one or two small decisions and they need to be, they need to, they need to be confident in their decision making because if they're in between decisions, they're, they're not making, you know, I always tell kids it's, it's better to commit yourself 100% to the wrong decision than 50% to the right. And so to me, all the, and I want them to be strong and I want them to either fail at the decision they're making or you know, obviously, and I'd rather have them commit to a decision that they're making that they fail at cause then they'll learn, they'll learn. But if they're halfway committed, they're not really doing it right and they're not strong enough mentally, they're still second guessing themselves.

[27:24](#)

J: Oh absolutely. And those, those habits that you're laying down there that you're setting as you've talked through this podcast, you've laid out the standards that you produce in your, in your training environment, the environment you're trying to set to build resiliency and mental toughness, like play the backdraws. That's an environment that you're putting them in to be able to see how they deal with that and cope with those. Now. I was, I would think that over the course of year after year that they're playing and they're starting to ingrain these as habits, that's where they start being banked more into the unconscious. So they're able to do these things without actually thinking. And by then actually doing that is when they're able to make these

quicker decisions and they're actually able to come up with more creative solutions because they're able to deal with the tough parts because they've made them a permanent habit. So it's basically, practice will then bring the creativity because you're drilling the toughest part of competing into the unconscious side that takes over in the heat of battle.

[28:23](#)

D: Exactly. So then they're playing, they're playing in the heat of battle, how they, how they feel and the feelings have been ingrained through years and years of training properly and handling situations properly and decision making the right way properly. You know, I always say, thinking on the court or thinking while you're playing is overrated. Planning before you start the point is underrated. A lot of kids don't do enough of that and they think too much while they're playing. And a lot of that has to do with they just haven't, they haven't got to a point where they're playing on their feet, how they feel, what's the right shot based on how this feels, my body, how much I'm moving, and they're thinking a little too much. And so yeah, we want to get them where they're feeling a little more and thinking a little less.

[29:08](#)

L: I would agree Dave, and I think that, you know, action is where it's at and you plan to act and then you, you go and you do it and you trust your training. We know that people develop habits in the way that they think, not just in behaviors. We always think about habits as behaviors, but also in a way that they think. And so if they see a cloudy, gloomy day, they might have the same response over and over again where someone else would have a different one. So we build these habits of thinking as well. And these unconscious habits work underneath the surface and they're unaware of why they feel the way they do. Right? Or why they play way they do. And those things have to be brought to the surface and I love how through exposing them to different situations, asking questions, you can really bring that stuff back to the consciousness again and talk about what's actually going on. And that's why I believe practice matches are so important. That's our opportunity really to get in there and work on the competitive side.

[30:02](#)

D: Yup. And then, you know, it's kind of, to me that's a bridge between drilling and tournament play is practice matches. You have, you know, you still have, if you go about them the right way, you're still competing. You're trying to balance, cause I always, I always talk to the players about balancing competitiveness with development. And those two, sometimes they outweigh each other one way or another. You've got one kid that's all about development and he looks great, but he can't win a match. And you've got one kid who competes their butt out, but they're, because they're competing, they're not developing how they're supposed to play or they're, they're not getting out of their comfort zone. So later on they'll struggle because what wins when you're younger doesn't always win when you're older. And so they don't really get out of that. So we talk a lot about balancing those two and to me like that's a great time to really do a good job in balancing the two and, and working with your, I guess your percentages of how, how you're balancing the two is in match play. Sometimes you even in, in practice match play. And so when you're playing a

practice match, maybe you want to work on a different style. So you're totally where you, maybe you're going to serve and volley a little more, you're going to work on every ball that's short. You're going to rip and come in. And that's not what you normally do. So maybe you're working on more development on that, in that match, but you're still doing it within a match format, which is, which is important. And maybe you're right before a tournament and you wanna work on your style, which you're doing, so you go a little bit more towards the competitive side. You can tinker with your percentages in practice matches, which is I think is super important.

[31:28](#)

J: That's a great point. I love how you said that that balance between development and competing, as you said it, sometimes when you sway too much on development then you can almost become somewhat robotic so that when you come into competitive situations you freeze.

[31:43](#)

L: Well, you start avoiding competitive situations and it becomes an excuse, right? Well I actually worked...

[31:49](#)

D: I hit the ball well but...

[31:50](#)

L: Yeah. Well that doesn't, didn't win you the match. There's a lot of great hitters out there that don't win matches.

[31:55](#)

J: And then vice versa, if you, if we compete all the time and we don't work on our skills that much, we're actually limiting or lowering our ceiling. Because we're not developing a skill set that can really compete at any level that we're striving to achieve, right? So, that, that balance you said, I mean that's a, that's a great thing to bear in mind and for the players, coaches or parents listening to that, it's important to have those hand in hand. So, so I know Dave...

[32:20](#)

D: I've worked with... One last thing, I've worked, at one point in my career I had three different players at the same time that one swayed one way, one swayed the other way and the other one was in the middle. And we had to always talk about that. We always had to talk about that. I had one that hit the ball, great, great athlete, but didn't really win a lot when he was in 14s. If the sun didn't shine great, if he didn't hit the ball perfectly, he's losing his matches, you know? And then I had one who literally would sit out there and do a forehand drill where I was like, okay, if you make five errors, you're out. And he would sit out for 30 minutes, but he's hitting the ball 25 miles an hour cause he wanted to win the game. He wanted to win that that, he wanted to be better than those other guys and Tim being better was sitting in that corner longer than they were and you always have to, kids usually sway one way or another and you kind of have to bring them back a little bit more so they're balanced.

[33:09](#)

L: Great point. Psychologically that that's a fundamental thing that we have to figure out as coaches at a young age. Absolutely.

[33:16](#)

J: Awesome. Well, Dave, listen, we want to respect your time and greatly appreciate you coming on here. We, we always like to leave the listeners with a few key tips, so I guess I'm going to take the opportunity to ask you two different questions here. The first one being for the players and parents that are listening in to this, that are striving, striving to achieve whatever their heart's desire, what are, what are two or three bits of advice that you could give to promising junior players?

[33:39](#)

D: I mean, I would say be around a culture all the time for practice that incorporates the right habits, that obviously if you want to be a really good player, you've got to have a coach or a program that's willing to sacrifice as much as you are to being that, that type of player. So being in the right environment and then you know, do your job, do your job when you get there in that right environment, you know. Compete. Work on your competitiveness, work on your athletic development, work on your skillset and you know, expose yourself. Like Larry said, expose yourself to uncomfortable situations to expose yourself to high level competition. Expose yourself to, you know, lower level competition where you have, you have a lot of pressure. Just expose yourself to uncomfortable situations.

[34:21](#)

J: That's awesome. And then on the flip side, for coaches, coaches out there looking to develop their programs or looking, you know, you talked about creating a strong culture. What are the, what are the top tips you would give to coaches that are looking to really enhance their programs and create stronger cultures?

[34:35](#)

D: Yeah. If you're trying to create a strong culture, one is, you know, got to get the, you got to get the kids professional. You gotta get them professional. You gotta get them doing all the little things that, you know, like many pros do, where they're, you know, they're doing all the little things before they even hit the court or they're learning how to eat right or they're learning, you got to get the kids professional and then you gotta get them competing. You know, that's the thing. You gotta get them competing. You got to get them playing a lot of practice sets. We play, we play practice sets out of the five days, five-six days, we have our full time program and even our afterschool, we play matches in six out of seven days. Or if we have a six days, we do five. The only day we don't play practice matches is Monday. We play on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, we play practice sets. So get them playing a lot and just work on every aspect of their game and get guys around you that are willing to, to do the same thing. And that's all you need. I mean, our program is good, not, you know, I say it not because of me but because the guys I have, I have gotten to help me. That's why our program has done well. The guys I have are incredible and they work really hard. You know, we all have the same culture.

[35:40](#)

J: Awesome. Absolutely awesome Dave. And a great piece of advice and Dr. Larry, just any, any more thoughts from you before we wrap up?

[35:47](#)

L: Well, I think, you know, this goes to show why Dave has had a lot of success where he's been and developed a lot of players. It's, it's a well thought out approach and it considers all areas of development and it's not just technical or just on competing. It's developing a well rounded athlete. There's a philosophy, there's a culture and you know, all the respect in the world for you, Dave. You do a great job. Always enjoy our conversations and yeah, keep sending players my way, man.

[36:16](#)

D: Yeah, no, thank you for all your help with all my players. They always call you so.

[36:21](#)

L: Anytime, anytime.

[36:23](#)

J: Awesome. Well, Dave, thanks so much for joining us today on the podcast. It's been absolutely great listening to some of your insights and wisdom. We hope we can get you on again in the future.

[36:32](#)

D: Anytime, Johnny. Appreciate it.

[36:33](#)

J: Awesome. Awesome. Well, thanks for joining us today on today's episode of compete like a champion. At the bottom of our podcast page, you'll find a little review that you can leave. Please leave a review, write some comments, write some thoughts as to what you'd like us to speak about in the future, and we'll take a look at that. Until next time, Dr. Larry Lauer and I are checking out.

[36:55](#)

L: Checking it out.