

One Point at a Time: An Interview with an Elite Tennis Player

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Abstract

The effectiveness of mental training has been widely studied within the field of sport psychology (Martin, Moritz, & Hall, 1999). In addition, several researchers have begun to conduct evaluations of programs and consultants (see Gentner, Fisher, & Wisberg, 2001; Gould, Murphy, Tammen, & May, 1991; Gould, Tammen, Murphy, & May, 1989; Orlick & Partington, 1987; Partington & Orlick, 1987a, 1987b). However, there remains a dearth of information in the literature regarding athletes' experiences with sport psychology. This interview provides sport psychology professionals and athletes an opportunity to hear one elite tennis player's "voice," regarding his experiences and views on sport psychology. He provides some very valuable insights on the importance of developing a close personal relationship with a sport psychology consultant, effective strategies for dealing with distractions, focusing on positive aspects of performance, becoming confident and the search for happiness.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to give "voice" to one athlete, Chris Woodruff, a professional tennis player, to better understand his experience with sport psychology. The transcript presented is from an interview I conducted with this elite tennis player regarding his experience with sport psychology.

Chris Woodruff is 30 years old and recently retired from competitive tennis after 22 years. He was an NCAA Singles National Champion and 2 time All-American in college. He competed on the ATP tour for 14 years reaching a singles ranking of number 12 in the world. He captured 2 ATP titles, played on the United States Davis Cup

Team and reached the quarterfinals of the Australian Open. While competing on the tour, Chris worked with a sport psychology consultant for over 6 years. He is currently finishing his collegiate degree and volunteering his time with an NCAA Division I tennis team.

Interview

Noah

When you think about your experiences with sport psychology, what stands out for you?

Chris

For me personally I don't know necessarily if it's one specific thing that stands out. I tried to incorporate it as a state of mind and

as almost a ritual. By that I mean I tried to make it a habit to incorporate into my training. It was a way of mental training for me. I'd always focused on the physical part of tennis, the strategies of how you break your opponent down in terms of his strengths and weaknesses. Sport psychology was something that I discovered relatively late in my career; by late I mean I started playing professionally in 1993 and it wasn't really until the summer of 1997 that I felt like I was using it full time.

Noah

You mentioned that it's a state of mind or a ritual, can you talk a little more about that in terms of practice and things like that?

Chris

Well I would try to meet with a Sport Psychologist once a week when I was in town. Obviously with tennis being such a global sport it was hard to do that. I tried to keep in touch through e-mail and telephone. Looking back on it I think people make the mistake, they treat a sport psychologist like a medical doctor and what I mean by that is you go to a doctor if your sick and most people seek sport psychologists out when things are going poorly but I think honestly where you can make the most impact is when things are going well. It's not something that is just superficial, it goes a lot deeper than that in terms of learning how to control your mind. Back to my point about using it when things are going well, I think it has to become a habit going in. I think it's important for the person you are talking with to know how you feel when you have a sense of balance and how you feel when you're down, those two things are very important. I think it's very important that the sport psychologist knows how you feel when you're up and down, and then I think he can get to know you on a more personal

level and get to know how your inner emotions work when things are going poorly.

Noah

You talked a little bit about how you discovered it pretty late in your career. Can you talk a little bit about that process and discovery?

Chris

Well with tennis being an individual sport it's tough, you don't really have anyone out there to lean on. It's a very private sport and it's a very, I think, cut-throat sport because you're playing against somebody, so there's always a direct outcome after your match. It's not a meet or tournament where you have 2 or 3 days to get it going. If you win you advance, if you lose you go home. So I started in 97 because things were going poorly and I was finding myself becoming distracted. Distracted to me has numerous meanings. You could be distracted by the travel or the loneliness, so I think my situation was unique because I came to the sport psychologist I use with multiple problems. I was distracted off the court with the travel and the loneliness of the business and I was also distracted mentally on the court. I would let, for lack of a better word, demons get inside my head. I think tennis is such a competitive sport that it's easy to become caught up in the winning and the losing of it. By demons I mean that I would always try but I think I would try to the point where I was over-trying, and when I was over-trying I would say things internally that probably shouldn't be said. I think that my mind was becoming so cluttered that it was impairing my ability to go out there and just let it happen.

Noah

So it was just a lot of negative thinking and...

Chris

A lot of negative thoughts that were blocking, what I would call, and what I have read about, the Ideal Performance State.

Noah

You just mentioned reading things, could you talk a little more about that?

Chris

Well I used to work with Dr. X, a sport psychologist, and I read some articles by him and I also read *In Pursuit of Excellence* by Orlick. So, I read Orlick's book and I was seeing a sport psychologist and then it became apparent that just because I was reading all this stuff I wasn't gonna be able to figure it out on my own.

Noah

And you said you were reading things and you got to this point where you were kind of like, "I can't do this on my own, I need help".

Chris

Right, right, I guess to equate it if you're having problems in school you get to the point where you're like, "I just can't grasp the concept, I just can't do it on my own, so I need to go get help." You could look to the sport psychologist as a tutor, the way I tried to look at it.

Noah

Can you talk a little bit more about how that played out, being a tutor?

Chris

Well when we started we had to try to find out what the problems were and I was having problems with distractions, basically is what we called them, on the court and off the court, and we tried to use different techniques, very simple almost child-like techniques. I just remember Doc always using

very simple techniques. For example, 1997, the year I was playing some really good tennis, we used what was called a toolbox. The analogy behind that was that you went to Sears and you bought a little plastic toolbox and you put that toolbox in your bag when you went on the court. And on the changeover you would not allow your mind to think about negative things or things that had happened in the past to influence the match. Such as, well you lost a big point so the match starts getting away from you, who was in the stands-the crowd, the weather, anything that was a variable that could affect the outcome of the match. With the idea being that the answers to all your problems were within that toolbox. And you'd sit down on the changeover and that toolbox would serve as a reminder, no different than if I went out there and could have written that on my wristband, it was something to trigger my head.

Another concept that we worked on was, I would tell the sport psychologist where I was going to play the next tournament. We'd sit in there and we'd try to visualize and feel what that tournament was going to be like. I had played all these tournaments before so I could elaborate to him on what the environment was going to be like and sometimes I even knew who I was going to play so we could visualize that. So when I showed up for the tournament I had some idea about what I was going to try and focus on that week, a tool that I was going to use.

Noah

So you used a lot of imagery with him to work with the distractions and things that you really needed to focus on for a particular match or tournament?

Chris

Yes, a lot of the work was done before I showed up for the tournament. So it wasn't

like the equivalent of cramming for an exam. I'd already prepared mentally, I knew what I was getting into based on the sessions that we had before and what we'd talked about. So when I showed up I'd already done the work so I didn't have to cram.

Noah

Can you talk a little bit more about that process of preparing really early for those things?

Chris

Well, earlier in my career, to me preparing was physical, it was hitting a lot of tennis balls, making sure you were in tip-top shape. As I became older, I sort of re-structured the training and spent less time hitting balls because it was taking effects on my body, and I just felt like it was important to show up ready to play these matches. For me I always knew I could hit tennis balls as well as anybody, so I felt like being mentally prepared was equally as important as being physically prepared.

Noah

Can you talk a little bit about what it meant to you to be mentally prepared?

Chris

To me being mentally prepared meant that I had, in my own mind, met the requirements and achieved the things that we were going to try and work on for that particular week. For example, if I were going to play in the French Open, I had already done all the work necessary to know that the points were going to be long, and it was going to be a totally different style of tennis. There were going to have to be a lot of adaptations taking place for somebody who hadn't played on clay a lot. So I knew going into it there was going to be a lot of adversity and that's what I mean by mentally ready or prepared.

Noah

So it sounds like you did a lot of event preparation and really took into account the differences from different tournaments or maybe the people that you might be playing. So it sounds like it was kind of event-driven, it was like, "I have this event coming up and..."

Chris

Correct, the idea for me was trying to become not result oriented, it was always staying in the now, the present, it wasn't focusing on the winning and losing. It was giving yourself the best chance of succeeding, to achieve your goal. I can remember many matches where I walked off the court and I lost but after the match I wasn't hard on myself, I didn't beat myself up. I said, "Well, I achieved what I wanted to mentally, even though I lost, I did what I had set out to do."

Noah

What was that like for you to be able to do that?

Chris

It was a sense of relief and I think it helped me conserve energy. By not worrying about the winning and losing and by being mentally how I wanted to feel, it made the trips go by smoother, it made the trips go by a lot quicker, and I think internally I was a lot happier because of what I was achieving. I felt like I was ascending toward the top of where I wanted to be mentally.

Noah

You mentioned that you wanted to develop that present focus and not focus on outcomes or the future. Could you talk a little about the process of working toward getting there?

Chris

Well, I think as an athlete you always want

to win and I think when you hear the great people talk they always talk about, “Well, I can’t really control what my opponent does, I just have to go out there and take care of myself and I’m not going to pay attention to the scoreboard. If I go out there and play my own game, the rest will take care of itself.” So, I think once you understand and you have that mentality, and it also has to do with trusting your own game and having confidence in yourself, and once you’re able to achieve that, the winning and losing will take care of itself, I think.

Noah

You’ve mentioned the travel a couple of times. Would you mind talking a little more about that and how sport psychology has played a role in that?

Chris

Well I think anytime you’re traveling as much as I was the first 5 or 6 years which was roughly about 34 or 35 weeks out of the year, I think it becomes mentally frustrating. There are so many distractions that go into it, with the airport delays, and other distractions, and these distractions can kind of impinge your performance. So, I tried to look at this, early in my career. Before I started getting some help I looked at it as more of a hard-line approach, you know this is a job, you have to pack it up and go out there and go it alone. Prior to getting help I took that attitude. Later on, it was a much more positive way of thinking, a lot of people would crave to be in your position rather than be sitting behind a desk. And just try to really relish the fact that I was a professional athlete and I was making good money, you would never make this money shy of being a CEO or a bigshot in a company. I just tried to really relish the fact that what I do for a living is unique it’s a great opportunity and it’s fun. But then, always in the back of your

mind is the grass is always greener on the other side, and it took along time to see.

I remember early on in my career it was always such a relief, you know I couldn’t wait to get home. And it was tough early on cause I’d be losing in a match and scheduled to leave that next day and I’d think, “Oh if you don’t win you’re out of here tomorrow.” So we just tried to work on looking at it on a more positive outlook rather than, it’s not so much something I have to do but it’s something I want to do. I think there’s a big distinction between the two. It showed me that when you have a job you need to make sure you enjoy it because if you have a job you don’t enjoy you can run into those mental barriers that I described earlier.

Noah

Can you talk a little bit more about that process of coming to that realization that you have to enjoy it when you’re out there?

Chris

I think the first thing I did was, I had to understand what it meant to compete. That when you went out on the court that competing was not winning and losing. Competing to me, and I think this is the caveat of the whole thing, to me competing meant to try and achieve personal satisfaction, that competing was not going out there and winning and losing, back to the old adage of becoming result oriented. *To me self-satisfaction was eventually gained by the ability to be true to yourself, being prepared and actually loving the fact that you were playing professional tennis. And, I think my career really rocketed once I could finally grasp that concept.*

Noah

So, just enjoying being out there and knowing that I’m gonna accomplish my goals as

opposed to focusing on the goals that somebody else has set for me?

Chris

Right, you bring up a good point, something else that was happening early in my career, there are ups and downs. To me, pressure is something that you only put on yourself. Once I discovered that that was what pressure meant, in my mind's eye it helped me. Before, pressure was picking up the paper and reading, “Woodruff chokes,” “Woodruff lets it slip away.” You know, “Where are the next young American tennis players?” When you see things like that, that is what I meant by some of the distractions that go along with playing professional tennis. I think once I understood the pressure, and it took me a long time to realize this, who cares what the paper writes, it's only a matter of you finding what makes you happy. And when I talked about winning and losing and having to block out all this stuff, when I found out I could overcome those intangible things, that's when I felt like I was at my happiest.

Noah

You mentioned earlier, “I got help” or “I needed help”, can you talk about that decision to seek out help so to speak?

Chris

Anytime you self-admit you need help it's a blow to the ego. There have been many athletes, and I see it every day helping the tennis team here at the university, people look at going to get help as a sign of weakness. And it took me a long time to realize that it's almost the exact opposite, that it's a sign of strength that you can swallow your pride and you can go in and admit that you have a couple of problems. Because I think in the course of my playing sports, there have been maybe three or four people who just have it. There's an article about tennis, what is the

“it” when you say, “They got it.” What does that “it” mean? I mean, is it a magic potion? And I think there have been some athletes, you know Sampras and Agassi and Becker, who had “it”. They were blessed or whatever you want to call it. They were extremely gifted, they didn't need that help that some of us need. And it doesn't mean that people who go get help are weaker, it just means that they might not see things in the same light as the people that I just mentioned did. So, I think it was almost the exact opposite, I felt better about going to get the help. It was like the sewage had been let out of my body. The pollutants just finally overwhelmed me and it was hampering my play.

Noah

I think that's a great point because often times people say that those people who go and get help are the weak ones but then there are a lot of people that say they're the really strong ones.

Chris

Right, and I think the people who say that (that only the weak ones go) are maybe insecure. From a competitive standpoint they might be a little insecure and so it's like they're hiding it and they don't want to admit that they have a problem.

Noah

You mentioned very early on as you were talking about your experiences that the consultant really needs to understand how you feel when you're up and when you're down, can you talk a little bit more about that?

Chris

Well, I think it's really hard to grow if you're only going in when things are going poorly, because based on past experience, if we're always going in when things are going poorly, in the field of sport psychology

there's only so much the guy can tell you. So starting out, when I was always going in there when things were going poorly it was like we were taking 2 steps forward but we were always taking that one step back. So, we were always just barely keeping our chin above the water. When I went in there when things were going well we could...this is complicated and I'm not sure if I am saying this right...but when I went in there when things were going well it was like we could build on the positives and maybe not focus on the things we had been over until I was blue in the face but we could see things in a different light and be like, "Ha, that's what works for you." So then we could kind of throw away the negatives and build on the positives. And forget about the negative things, and we tried to focus on what I was feeling when I won this or how were my emotions when I served out the match. And we could take those positives and in turn use those as guides for when I got into a tough situation on the court.

Noah

So taking those feelings when things were going well and then being able to maybe implement them to get yourself to that point when things weren't going well?

Chris

Right, so for example if I served out a match at 5-4, we could take that and I did it, as opposed to, "Ahh, Doc I lost a match, I blew it again." We could take that how you felt, and what positive things did you do to serve out the match. We could take that, those experiences, and then apply them to when I got into that situation again. We could take those positives and use them as a model for the whole match and use those same upbeat emotions, that staying in the present, one point at a time, whatever you want to call it. We could use that as the standard model. And ultimately the goal would be that you

would never think about negative things when you were on the court and you would emulate only the positives. So if I were going in there when things were going well we could use those positive things to overthrow the negative things, so then ultimately every time I would go in to see the sport psychologist we would always try to keep it positive and we wouldn't have to have that negative review. You know, "Back in 1996 you came in here and said that exact same thing," instead we could say, "Ahh here's where you're positive, let's try to think about these things." And I'm not saying that was like a cure-all, I mean I lost my share of matches but I thought it was good that we were able to use those positives the way we did.

I guess what I'm saying is, if you always went into the doctor with a sore knee and he'd give you the pills, which would be the positives, "Go home and take these pills." If you went home and you didn't take the pills you'd have to go back in and you have the negative knee ache again. So, what I'm saying is if you went in with the positives, you talked about it, you got a grasp of what the concept of what exactly the positives were, it would make you feel better and the knee ache would go away so to speak. So we're not constantly having to waste all our time on the negative knee because I took the pills. That doesn't mean my knee's always perfect, it still could hurt, but if I go in and I try to do the positives and focus on the positives, chances are it's gonna cure.

Noah

So you take those pills, or techniques, and build on them (**Chris:** Exactly) and then you just keep building on them (**Chris:** Exactly) as opposed to going back to, "Oh, my knee hurts." (**Chris:** Exactly).

Noah

Ok. I just want to go back again to when you think about just your overall experiences with sport psychology, what stands out to you?

Chris

Well, it's helped me in two ways. It's helped me focus. Now that I'm not playing tennis anymore I have the positive effects of sport psychology on me that can be carried over to life. I could have folded up the tent when things were going poorly in '97. I thought about quitting the game numerous times prior to '97, so now when I come across a difficult task I tell myself, "Hey, you can get through this." It's taught me about patience, just having patience, whether you're in a traffic jam and you're late, not to try and panic. How to reason things out, how to be positive with everything in life and relating to tennis, you try to control your inner emotions, I guess is the one thing I would say sport psychology has done for me. It's enabled me to control my inner emotions. Sure I have my bad days where I lose my temper and I don't think rationally but I think it's really helped me, it's taught me to grow up and really become a problem solver rather than being negative and focusing on, "Well great, I got screwed again, the cards are stacked against me." It's taught me how to see things on the brighter side and be more positive, which helped me. Ultimately it helped me accomplish what I was trying to accomplish in tennis, it helped me just feel good about myself. And, rather than having an inferiority complex, it's taught me how to keep a positive outlook on things.

Noah

So, really it's helped with tennis but also just in general with the way that you carry yourself and how you feel about yourself?

Chris

Right. And ultimately, there came a time when I just lost interest (in competing in tennis at that level). I don't blame that on sport psychology. I think there is such a thing as burnout, when you're playing so hard and the tough thing about my sport, I think, is there's always a direct result. In school, maybe you don't see the direct result until the end of the semester when grades come out, but in tennis you saw the direct result and there were a lot of times when there were rocky roads there. So, that was the one thing that made tennis tough, you saw the result at the end of the day.

Noah

You talked about how you used the things you learned in sport psychology in other parts of your life. Would you mind talking a little more about that?

Chris

Well, I feel I'm a more positive person. With school, you compare it to tennis. I try not to become so grade oriented. I try to focus on how to study. You know, in tennis I tried not to focus on, "If you lose this match," I tried to focus on playing one point at a time, and not if you lose this match it's the end of the world. So, that's a good comparison right there. And I keep coming back to this point of results. I think if you rush ahead and think about the results, that's when the mind goes into panic. You know, if you look at the syllabus and say, "I got a paper due this time and I got a paper due this time," you know, you're immediately going to panic. Rather than if you compartmentalize, just like tennis you had to compartmentalize the points, I mean you play one point and it's gone, and then you're focusing on the next, and I keep coming back to this term too, the process of it and not the result.

Noah

That's a great point. People get caught up all the time in what's gonna happen...

Chris

And it's unavoidable, thinking about the result is unavoidable. I think everybody has, whether it be an athlete or a student or in the work world, I think everybody to an extent has a competitive side and they want to do well. I think it's those people who can play the points one at a time, and block out all of the distractions who become the best. Ultimately I guess in a nutshell it's your ability to be able to block out all the distractions. That's what makes the great ones good. They have this innate ability to focus on what is important and block out what isn't important. I think that's ultimately how you succeed in life, you have the ability to focus. The people who have the ability to focus are the ones who succeed. And not all of us have that same level, or are born with that ability to focus. And it's the ones who aren't necessarily born with that focus, or who aren't taught how to focus at a young age, like Tiger Woods' father did to him, he taught him how to focus at such a young age. It's those people that need to go get help and I think they can ultimately achieve the same goals that those who are born with it can.

Noah

So, it can kind of level the playing field so to speak?

Chris

Yeah, I think it can level it. You go see a sport psychologist to free your mind up and not become so mechanical. But paralysis by analysis, I think that could be very true. That's the only drawback that I would say with sport psychology is it makes you become too analytical sometimes. The goal you're trying to achieve is to free your mind

up and not become so analytical, but I've seen many players become too mechanical. They become so ensconced in, "I gotta," you know, in making the first serve that they becomes so mechanical (in their thought process) and they can't free up. And I think ultimately the goal of a sport psychologist is to free your mind up.

Noah

So instead of freeing up, they break everything up into the littlest part...

Chris

Exactly. Well, with the goal of the sport psychologist being to try to get you to go out and play without thinking, sometimes I think old habits die hard, and I think you have to be careful who you work with. That goes back to my point that it's important for the sport psychologist to see you when you're up and when you're down and to get to know you on a personal level and to get to understand what makes you, you.

Noah

You've mentioned a couple times the importance of having the right person, the right sport psychologist...

Chris

I think you need to use them on a regular basis. You have to get to know their personality and whether or not it's a fit. With me I'm a type A personality, I'm very regimented, hard worker, very dedicated, very cerebral. The guy I worked with is also extremely cerebral, a good thinker, but he did a good job of never letting me see him get upset. And he had good balance and that was something that helped me because when I came to him I needed some balance. And he was able to provide that. So it's important that you get to know your sport psychologist on a personal level. And it's tough if you work with what I would call, (not saying the

guy I worked with isn't a guru), the commercialized sport psychologist. They're so busy and they make so much money that sometimes if you're not at the top of your playing field or the top of your profession, they don't have time for you.

Noah

So it sounds like he was able to see what you needed, or maybe you told him what you needed...

Chris

Correct. He was able to travel with me to some tournaments. We lived in the same town so we could always deal on the more intimate level than if we were shooting e-mails back and forth to each other and talking on the phone. He was just always willing to make time for me.

Noah

And that intimacy was more effective for you?

Chris

Absolutely, compared to the guy who's got 4, 5 other people he's working with and he's promoting himself, so to speak. Whereas the guy I work with, you know we live in the same town and we got to know each other on a personal level.

Noah

Earlier you had mentioned that one of the really important things was learning how to control your emotions. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

Chris

Well, me being type A and having a fiery temper and being competitive, extremely, ultra competitive, I think that sometimes got in the way of me performing, and I would let that impair my performance. Whereas Michael Jordan's extremely competitive but

he's another guy that I would say, he's born with that "it". You know he's hard as heck on his players, he's very hard on himself but he just had that intangible gift. Somebody like myself, I couldn't necessarily reason or think the way he did or have that self-confidence that he had. So my sport psychologist tried to help. I think we all have our little insecurities and we all struggle at some point with our confidence. Are we good enough to succeed? And I think for me it just took a while longer to grasp the idea that I was good enough to succeed and I was a pretty good player. And I probably never really did get that confidence that I needed to get to that next level. Maybe I needed to box that confidence, somebody who boxes that confidence that they have. But to an extent you are who you are, this is my personality. We were always working on trying to get me to become more confident, that was also a long term goal, trying to get me to become more confident. We tried to fit it into our model but I don't necessarily know if we got there, got my confidence out of me.

Noah

You mentioned Sampras and Agassi and Jordan as having that "it", and we talked a little bit about other people not having that "it", and using sport psychology as a way to get closer to it. Would you mind talking a little more about that?

Chris

Yeah, I think there is only so much, or only so many mental tools that one can offer. And in sports I think there are only so many roads you can go down before you get shut out. And back to my point about you are who you are, the guy I worked with, we could only do so much and then the rest I think I was who I was, so we were always battling that problem. In order to be successful I think the person has to feel like he can

change but the reality is I think you can only change a person so much.

Noah

So you might come to this point where maybe you've gone as far as you can and the consultant has to understand who you are and work with that and try to change but knowing you can only change so much.

Chris

Right, you're always trying to have that relentless pursuit of perfection, with the operative word being pursuit. I mean you're always trying to pursue it. And I think there comes a time where you've exhausted yourself and then you can't transform yourself out of some mold and walk around and be somebody you're not.

Noah

Before we finish up, is there anything you'd like to add ?

Chris

I think that sport psychology is very technical. I think it's deeper than an art. I think it's complicated. And sometimes it's very difficult to find the solutions. It's easy to say to somebody, just play one point at a time, but it's like, "What exactly does that mean?" Because in tennis ultimately that's the best way to become successful and the people who are extremely successful have the ability to focus and not give in to the moment, and I think that is what makes the great ones great. They do not give into the moment. They have an unbelievable ability to block out all the things that might make them fail. I don't think that they even think about failing. I don't think they question, "Well what happens if I don't win, or if I don't do this or do that?" You have to have that focus, and if you don't have that focus you have to somehow tap into it.

Some people think they can do it alone, I've been down that path in school. You think you can do it alone and it continues to get worse and worse, or you avoid it, "I'll read it tomorrow or I'll read it over the weekend." And you don't tackle the problem. That's kind of similar to a career. If you avoid, avoid, avoid, there's only so many years you can play tennis and tennis is so tough because tennis is match play every single day.

Noah

You mentioned with some of the sport psychology techniques that they're easy to say but they're tougher to implement. Could you talk a little more about that?

Chris

Well, for example if you have a tendency when you're closing out a match for your heart rate will go up, you go in and you say, "Ok, Doc when I'm serving out the match my heartbeat is going way up." He may tell you, "You have to breathe more." What is "breathe more"? Does it mean take deeper breaths, does it mean breathe quickly? Breathing more could be a way of saying take your time, walk around and take your time. I think that's where it's tough. You have to get the sport psychologist to live in your moment. That's what makes it so tough often times. Maybe the sport psychologist is someone who's never had to play in front of 15,000 people. They're probably not gonna have to speak in front of 15,000 people. Imagine if he had to give his talk to 15,000 people, and the wind was howling and your papers were going everywhere, it becomes awfully tough.

It goes back to that personal relationship that I was talking about. You have to tell the person you're working with, everything you can about yourself and how you feel in situations, so that you almost have hiero-

glyphics, that when you go in and he tells you to breathe, it's like subliminally you understand what he means by breathe.

Noah

So they have to be more specific and also having an understanding of who you are, so they know what you need, and you also have an understanding of who he is so when he says things you kind of...

Chris

Right, so you understand each other. Because my breathing when I'm serving out the match, my plan of attack, might be different from what you have to do to breathe. You may focus on your breathing so you're doing it every breath. I may just try to take a deep breath in and breathe out. They're different. That's what makes sport psychology such a unique field in my opinion. You deal with people all trying to achieve the same goal probably but there are a lot of ways to go about getting that person to achieve that goal.

Noah

Anything else you want to add?

Chris

I think the other thing with sport psychology, is that you're dealing with people's emotions and when you deal with people's emotions, I think it's very hard ultimately to find out what triggers that emotion and I think ultimately that's where one can fail. You're trying to find out the root of the problem. There are so many things that could be bothering you. Ultimately if you meet with someone for a month or two or three or a year or however long you meet, ultimately, there is one problem that is significant over all of the other little problems. It could be I'm distracted. Well that could be a ton of things. Am I distracted because of the crowd, am I distracted because of the way I'm playing? So there's just so many

things that go into it. That's one thing that I always found very difficult, we were always seeming to try to find what the root of the problem was. And for me the root of the problem was, I was distracted. Distracted in various ways but I became distracted in my field of work. You're dealing with emotions and anytime you're dealing with emotions, it's awfully tough to find out what the problem is and what the emotion is that's giving you trouble.

The other thing I would throw in is now you have somebody's emotions but you have to keep it simple. You don't want to get this paralysis by analysis. You take someone who is very analytical like myself, it's very easy to fall down that road of becoming too mechanical. You have to somehow keep it simple. I can't think of a more simple concept than going and buying a toolbox, that's a perfect example of how to keep things simple.

Summary

There are several factors that seem to characterize Chris Woodruff's experience with sport psychology. First, having a positive and personal relationship with his sport psychology consultant appeared to be of major importance in his experience. He was very close with his consultant and that relationship allowed them to work very well together. One of the things that they worked on was dealing with distractions both on and off the court. Chris was dealing with many distractions including travel, loneliness, and negative thoughts. He and his consultant used sport psychology to work on dealing with those distractions.

A major characteristic of Chris' experience included the way he implemented sport psychology techniques. He spoke highly of the use of simple, well explained techniques, like the toolbox. He seemed to believe that

these techniques were the most effective for him because they were easy to understand and implement. In addition to using simple techniques, Chris appeared to believe that it was important to focus on the positives when working with his consultant. He mentioned that constantly reliving the negatives was counterproductive and that using the positives as a model for future success was the most effective way for him to work.

One of the ways in which Chris worked on dealing with these distractions was to begin to focus more on the moment and play one point at a time. This seemed to be another major component of his experience. He said he was constantly trying to become more focused on each point and to not worry about the past or the future. He also worked on trying to focus on his own goals. As he continued playing, he learned that achieving his own goals was the most effective way for him to perform and to become happier person.

Attempting to become happier with his sport and his life was another major component of

his experience. He admitted to looking at the negative side of things, such as travel, especially earlier in his career and used sport psychology as a way to help himself be more positive and to enjoy his sport more. Finally, Chris mentioned the many lessons that he had learned from sport psychology. These included patience, focusing on the moment, and enjoying life. He felt that he was able to implement the skills he learned from sport psychology in other parts of his life and that his life was much happier because of that.

This interview provides valuable insight into one athletes' experience with sport psychology. Such detailed insights would be impossible to find through quantitative studies. Therefore, it is important that researchers employ qualitative methods of inquiry to give athletes a "voice". By listening to athletes' "voices", sport psychology consultants and professionals can gain a better understanding of athletes' experiences and improve their ability to improve performance and life quality.

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