

SEABURY & PERFORMANCE

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SPORTING REVIEW

SCIENTIFIC INSIGHT

CONTENT HIGHLIGHTS

February

Performance Psychology and Mental
Performance



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MESSAGE FROM TOM

February often represents a critical juncture for people who embarked on New Year's resolutions just a few weeks earlier. January's initial burst of excitement and resolve can start to wane as the reality of daily life sets in. Gym crowds thin out, eating habits slip back into old patterns, and that inspirational "New Year, New Me" mindset can fade into something more like "same old routine." Cold weather, shorter days, or lingering financial stress after the holidays can also dampen spirits, making it harder to maintain the fresh energy that started the year.

This phenomenon often stems from unrealistic goals or a lack of clear planning. When people make big, sweeping resolutions without smaller milestones, they may lose track of progress and begin to feel discouraged.

After the novelty of "turning over a new leaf" wears off, the demands of work, family, and other responsibilities can seem more pressing than hitting the gym or prepping healthy meals.

The key in February and beyond is to refocus on why these goals were set in the first place, break them down into achievable steps, and adjust expectations if necessary.

Renewing one's commitment and finding fresh sources of motivation—such as joining a group or tracking consistent, small victories—can help sustain the momentum long after the January optimism fades.

Tom Seabury

DR TOM SEABURY



ANCHORING BIAS: UNDERSTANDING OUR THOUGHTS

In the realm of psychology, cognitive biases subtly influence decision-making, behaviours, and perceptions. Among these biases, anchoring bias—the tendency to rely heavily on the first piece of information encountered (the “anchor”)—stands out as particularly impactful.

For athletes, this bias doesn’t just affect their mental game; it can significantly shape how they perceive coaching advice, training strategies, and their own potential.

Anchoring bias occurs when an initial piece of information sets a benchmark for decision-making and judgments. First described by psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman in the 1970s, this concept emerged from their seminal research on heuristics and biases. Their studies demonstrated how initial figures or ideas could disproportionately influence individuals, even when irrelevant to the task at hand.

In their experiment, participants were asked to spin a wheel that was rigged to land on specific numbers. They were then asked to estimate the percentage of African countries in the United Nations. Those who spun higher numbers gave significantly higher estimates than those who spun lower numbers despite the wheel’s irrelevance to the question. This demonstrated how an arbitrary anchor can skew judgment.

This effect is pervasive because humans naturally seek reference points when processing information, especially in situations involving uncertainty or new challenges. In sports, where performance is often measured against benchmarks, records, and goals, anchoring can subtly dictate an athlete’s mindset and performance trajectory.

Anchoring bias (though subtle) can hugely influence how athletes perceive their abilities and approach their training. By recognising and addressing this cognitive tendency, both athletes and coaches can foster an environment of growth, adaptability, and optimal performance. Anchors are not immovable weights—they are starting points that can be shifted with deliberate effort and awareness. In doing so, athletes unlock their true potential, unshackled by limiting beliefs or arbitrary benchmarks.

Want to learn more? Visit
www.seaburyperformance.com/blog for full length article



BOOK OF THE MONTH - THE RACKET

The Racket by Conor Niland offers an unfiltered look at the often-overlooked realities of life on the professional tennis tour. A former Irish tennis star, Niland takes readers behind the scenes of a world that is far removed from the glittering grand slams and lucrative sponsorship deals of elite players like Federer or Nadal.

Instead, he sheds light on the gruelling grind faced by those competing on the lower tiers of the sport, where survival often feels like the primary goal. Through candid anecdotes and sharp insights, Niland paints a vivid picture of a world where dreams clash with harsh realities.

The book explores themes of resilience, financial strain, and the mental toll of striving for excellence in an unforgiving environment. Niland shares stories of endless travel, modest accommodations, and the daily battles for ranking points just to keep hopes of making it to the main draws of prestigious tournaments alive.

His narrative resonates with authenticity, giving voice to a generation of players who must navigate the sport without the safety net of guaranteed earnings or consistent support. It is a sobering reminder of how the structure of professional tennis creates vast disparities between its stars and its journeymen.

For aspiring tennis players and sports enthusiasts alike, The Racket is an essential read. It offers invaluable lessons about the sacrifices required to pursue a career in professional sport and highlights the importance of mental toughness, self-belief, and perspective. Niland's journey underscores that success in sport isn't always defined by trophies or fame—it's also about perseverance and the courage to face challenges head-on.

By shining a light on the less glamorous side of professional tennis, Niland provides a balanced view of what it truly means to compete at the highest levels. The Racket isn't just a memoir; it's a call to reconsider how we define success and appreciate the dedication of athletes who embody the spirit of competition, even when the odds are stacked against them. For those in the sport, it serves as both a cautionary tale and an inspiring testament to the human spirit.



BOOK BY CONOR NILAND



DOOM LOOPS: THE VICIOUS CYCLE

Doom loops refer to self-reinforcing cycles of negative thought patterns, behaviours, and outcomes that perpetuate underperformance. For athletes, this can look like repeated failures leading to doubt, which in turn affects future performances, creating a loop that becomes harder to escape with each iteration. For instance, a soccer player might miss a penalty in a critical match. This failure could lead to thoughts like, "I'm terrible at penalties," which then increases anxiety the next time they're in a similar situation. The heightened pressure might lead to another miss, reinforcing the negative belief. Over time, the athlete's confidence erodes, and the doom loop strengthens.

Understanding doom loops is crucial for athletes because these cycles systematically undermine confidence, which is a cornerstone of athletic success. Athletes stuck in doom loops often avoid challenging situations, fearing failure, which stunts growth and prevents them from reaching their potential. Over time, the stress and frustration of repeated failure can lead to emotional exhaustion, a key component of athletic burnout.

Recognising the signs of doom loops empowers athletes to intervene before these cycles take root and cause long-term damage. The ability to identify and address these patterns can mean the difference between prolonged struggles and a successful recovery.

Breaking free from a doom loop begins with cultivating self-awareness. Athletes need to recognise the signs of a doom loop early. Journaling, mindfulness practices, and discussions with coaches or sports psychologists can help identify negative patterns before they spiral out of control.

Once these patterns are recognised, reframing negative thoughts becomes essential. Cognitive-behavioural techniques like thought restructuring can help athletes challenge distorted beliefs. For example, replacing "I always fail under pressure" with "I've succeeded in tough situations before" helps create a more balanced perspective.

Interested in this topic?

Read a full-length article on doom loops at www.seaburypperformance.com/blog

INTRATEAM COMMUNICATION AND PERFORMANCE IN DOUBLES TENNIS

In the heat of a doubles tennis match, quick decision-making and seamless coordination are key to success. But what separates great doubles teams from those that struggle? A study in 2009 took a deep dive into how communication impacts performance in NCAA Division I women's doubles teams. Their findings confirm what many experienced players and coaches may suspect: winning teams communicate more, communicate better, and communicate in a more structured way than losing teams.

The researchers recorded and analysed the communication between players during actual doubles matches, breaking down both verbal and nonverbal exchanges. They categorised different types of communication—such as action statements (e.g., “Let’s play aggressive”), factual statements (e.g., “The wind is strong on this side”), and emotional expressions (e.g., “Come on, we got this!”). By comparing the communication patterns of winning teams versus losing teams, they aimed to uncover what role communication plays in performance.

Key Findings: What Winning Teams Do Differently

1. **Winning Teams Talk More** – Winning teams exchanged twice as many messages as losing teams during matches. This means top-performing teams are constantly sharing information, strategising, and reinforcing each other.
2. **Winning Teams Have Clearer and More Structured Communication** – The way messages were delivered also mattered. Winning teams tended to have a predictable flow of communication, making it easier for teammates to understand and react quickly. Their messages followed logical sequences, like one player suggesting a strategy (“Let’s target her backhand”) and the partner acknowledging it (“Got it”). Losing teams, on the other hand, had more scattered and inconsistent communication patterns.
3. **Winning Teams Use More Action-Oriented and Tactical Statements** – Instead of just reacting to the match, top doubles teams proactively discuss their plans and strategies between points. Action statements, such as calling out a play or adjusting positioning, were much more frequent among winning teams.
4. **Emotional Support is a Key Factor** – More than half of all communication in doubles matches consisted of emotional statements. Encouraging words like “Great shot!” or “Let’s go!” were heavily used, and winning teams engaged in this type of communication even more frequently. Positive reinforcement helped keep confidence high and built a stronger mental connection between partners.
5. **Losing Teams Engage in More Off-Topic Conversations** – Interestingly, losing teams had more off-task discussions, such as talking about equipment discomfort or irrelevant details (“My shoes feel weird”). These moments of distraction could contribute to a lack of focus and coordination during critical points in the match.

What This Means for Tennis Players and Coaches

This study highlights a crucial takeaway: good communication isn’t just a bonus—it’s a competitive advantage in doubles tennis. If you want to elevate your doubles game, here are some practical ways to apply these findings:

- **Be Vocal and Engaged** – Don’t assume your partner knows what you’re thinking. The best doubles teams communicate consistently between points, discussing tactics, reading the opponent, and keeping each other focused.
- **Use Clear and Purposeful Language** – Avoid vague or confusing instructions. Instead of saying “Let’s mix it up,” be specific: “Let’s serve wide and attack the net.”
- **Acknowledge and Confirm Strategies** – Winning teams frequently used confirmation statements (e.g., “Got it,” “Yes, let’s do it”). This ensures both players are on the same page before the next point.
- **Encourage and Support Your Partner** – Positive reinforcement helps maintain energy and confidence, even when the match gets tough. A simple “Nice work” or a high-five after a well-executed point can make a big difference.

TYPE 1 ERRORS- A COACHING STRUGGLE

A Type 1 error, in statistical terms, is the mistake of rejecting what's called the "null hypothesis" when the null hypothesis is actually true. Stripped of the jargon, it means we see a supposed cause-and-effect relationship between a new method and an outcome when, in reality, the outcome was unrelated to that method.

In a tennis setting, this can manifest when a coach introduces an experimental volley drill or unique warm-up sequence, observes short-lived gains in matches, and concludes the new strategy is a game-changer—without considering other factors like player fatigue, the skill level of opponents, or mere chance.

Tennis, after all, is a sport of fine margins. The difference between an ace and a double fault is a matter of millimetres, and match outcomes can hinge on the tiniest shifts in confidence or momentum. As a result, it's remarkably easy to fall for a Type 1 error. A few lucky points can blend into a minor winning streak, which can then be (incorrectly) credited to that innovative practice drill.

Even highly skilled tennis coaches and sports scientists can slip into the trap of Type 1 errors due to confirmation bias. Once you believe a certain drill is revolutionary, you start noticing every small improvement as validation, overlooking variables like the opponent's form or natural performance fluctuations.

Imagine Jack, a junior player who consistently struggles with second-serve double faults. To address this, his coach modifies his racquet grip—pivoting slightly to a more extreme continental hold. In the next tournament, Jack's early matches are surprisingly strong: fewer double faults and an uptick in first-serve points won. Convinced they've cracked the code, the coach sings the grip's praises to colleagues and other players.

Yet, as the tournament progresses, Jack starts facing tougher opponents. The double faults creep back. He's soon out of the running and looking not much better off than before. On closer inspection, it turns out his stellar early performances owed more to a favourable draw than to any true technical breakthrough.

It's tempting to credit every spike in performance to the latest tweak in training or equipment. However, many of these perceived breakthroughs may simply be Type 1 errors: false positives that result from leaping to conclusions without enough evidence. Understanding this pitfall can be the difference between unlocking a genuine competitive edge and chasing a mirage.

Interested in this idea? Visit www.seaburyperformance.com/blog to read the full article



RED LIGHT GLASSES- THE SWITCH OFF AID

Red light glasses (designed to block blue light and other high-energy visible (HEV) wavelengths) have gained popularity as an effective tool for improving sleep quality and overall cognitive functioning. Exposure to blue light, especially in the evening, can interfere with the body's natural production of melatonin (the hormone responsible for regulating sleep-wake cycles).

Screens on smartphones, computers, and televisions emit high levels of blue light, and prolonged exposure before bed can delay sleep onset, reduce sleep quality, and disrupt circadian rhythms. Red light glasses mitigate these effects by filtering out blue light, creating an environment that allows the brain to recognise it is time to wind down.

Blocking blue light has profound implications for cognitive functioning. Quality sleep is essential for memory consolidation, emotional regulation, and overall brain health. Poor sleep or disrupted circadian rhythms can lead to diminished focus, slower reaction times, and reduced problem-solving abilities. By promoting better sleep, red light glasses indirectly enhance cognitive performance.

For individuals who work late hours or engage with screens during the evening, these glasses provide a simple yet impactful solution to maintain a healthy balance between productivity and rest. The result is a more rested mind, better equipped to handle daily challenges, and improved long-term mental clarity.





BELONGING: THE POWER OF CONNECTION

Belonging in sport is about far more than just making a team or wearing a uniform; it's the warm sense of connection an athlete experiences when they feel genuinely valued and supported. Research shows that when players believe they belong, they tend to be more motivated, open to learning, and resilient under pressure. On the other hand, those who feel sidelined or excluded may struggle with low confidence, higher levels of anxiety, and reduced enjoyment of the game. This sense of belonging is particularly powerful in helping athletes bounce back from challenges and setbacks.

A significant piece of the belonging puzzle lies in the individual characteristics each player brings to the team—traits shaped by their personality, cultural background, and personal experiences. These attributes influence how they handle feedback, how they interact with others, and how they cope with adversity. However, it's not enough for coaches to merely acknowledge these differences; they must also adapt communication and leadership styles to ensure every athlete feels heard and respected. Parents can play an important role here, too, by sharing insights about their child's unique temperament and learning preferences.

Just as crucial is a player's current state of mind, which can change daily due to factors like academic stress, family circumstances, or performance anxiety. Checking in on athletes' emotional well-being and offering simple coping tools—such as breathing exercises or journaling—can make a huge difference in keeping them engaged and confident. In turn, an inclusive coaching environment can encourage healthy self-expression and help athletes understand that it's okay to be vulnerable or to ask for help.

Ultimately, true belonging arises when these elements align and reinforce one another—when who the athlete is, how they're feeling, and how they're coached all create a supportive, positive experience. Coaches who invest in relationship-building, encourage constructive feedback, and celebrate both individual growth and team achievements often witness remarkable camaraderie and performance gains. When athletes genuinely believe they belong, they don't just play better—they thrive on and off the field.

If you want to learn more about this topic, visit www.seaburyperformance.com/blog to read a full article.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Life is about perspective and how you look at something... ultimately, you have to zoom out.”

Whitney Wolfe Herd

When life feels overwhelming, or when challenges stack up and it seems as though we’re barely keeping our heads above water, it can be incredibly powerful to step back and gain perspective. In the midst of struggle, our focus often narrows to the immediate stress or the obstacles directly in front of us, making it easy to lose sight of the bigger picture.

By zooming out, we can remind ourselves of where we’ve been, the challenges we’ve already overcome, and the progress we’ve made along the way. This broader view doesn’t erase the difficulty of the moment, but it can provide a sense of context and reassurance that the hard times are part of a larger journey—and that we’ve faced tough roads before and emerged stronger on the other side.

Perspective allows us to reframe our struggles not as insurmountable barriers but as stepping stones on a longer path. It shifts our focus from immediate discomfort to the resilience we’ve built, the lessons we’ve learned, and the goals we’re working toward.

Reflecting on how far we’ve come can be a powerful antidote to self-doubt, reminding us that we are capable of navigating rough waters, even when the journey feels slow or uncertain. In those moments, perspective becomes a source of strength, reminding us that setbacks and challenges are not the end of the story—they are merely chapters in a book still being written.

And when we see our lives through this lens, we can approach even the hardest moments with renewed clarity, patience, and belief in our ability to keep moving forward.



COACHING - TONE AND LANGUAGE

Coaches hold tremendous influence over an athlete's mental and emotional landscape, often more than they realise. While strategies and drills play a vital role in skill development, the subtleties of a coach's wording and body language can profoundly affect how athletes perceive themselves and their potential.

When delivering feedback, a calm, positive tone can help an athlete feel safe in taking risks and making mistakes—critical elements for growth in sport. For instance, suggesting, "Try shifting your weight just a bit more this way for a stronger shot," conveys constructive guidance that highlights opportunity rather than error.

Comparatively, a harsh or dismissive tone—"No! You aren't getting it!"—can erode confidence, discourage open communication, and lead athletes to fear mistakes instead of learning from them. The words chosen also matter: emphasising what to do ("Keep your head up and trust your follow-through") rather than what not to do ("Don't mess this up") steers attention towards proactive solutions.

Equally influential is a coach's body language. The difference between standing with arms crossed, brows furrowed, and little eye contact versus leaning in, maintaining engaged eye contact, and nodding in encouragement is striking. Positive nonverbal cues like a supportive tap on the shoulder, an affirming smile, or a celebratory fist bump can help athletes feel respected and motivated. Conversely, impatient gestures or constant scowling can transmit frustration or disapproval, which may heighten performance anxiety and chip away at trust.

Ultimately, athletes perform better when they sense genuine respect and belief from their coaches. By carefully choosing words that emphasise progress and potential, and by matching them with body language that radiates support and confidence, coaches can create an environment where athletes feel not just driven to succeed, but genuinely capable of it. This deeper sense of safety and affirmation can unlock levels of performance—and enjoyment—far beyond what basic drills or tactical suggestions alone can achieve.





FINAL THOUGHTS

As we close in on the 10% mark of 2025, we can see how the year is starting to shape up. Are you on track? Or are you starting to slip?

Whatever the answer, the good news is we have 90% to go. Plenty of time to improve, develop and grow. Plenty of time to get back on track or power on forward towards our end-of-year destination. So roll on the next 10%, and bring on the challenges, excitement and moments that it holds in store.

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