

# Optimal Tennis



Between Point Psychology: Maximizing Off Task Time During a Tennis Match

**Allen Berger, Ph.D.**

# Unique Characteristics of Tennis

1. Tennis is an exacting game, requiring precise combinations of timing, coordination, decision making, quickness, focused attention and stamina.
2. Bio-mechanically: A couple of degrees of difference in the face of your racquet when contacting the ball will have a tremendous effect on your shot.





On task time (actually striking the ball) ranges between 10 and 60% of the total time of a tennis match, which is determined by court surface and the style match-up of the players.



# Core Concepts of Optimal Tennis



Play with a  
**relaxed intensity.**



Play with  
**total commitment  
with no attachment.**





*Pressure is a privilege.*

Billy Jean King.

To Achieve these optimal performance states we need to fully utilize the “on task” and “off task” time on court.

# Breakdown of Time On and Off Task

- Vic Braden recorded the amount of time on task in two Pro matches:
  - Andre Agassi vs. Paul Annacone which Agassi won 6-4, 6-3.
  - Steffi Graf vs. Gabriella Sabatini which Sabatini won in 3 sets, 6-3, 4-6, 7-5.

# Actual Playing Time and Actual Number of Shots

- Match: Andre Agassi vs. Paul Annacone
  - On task time for both sets was 4.95 minutes.
    - 2.38 minutes in the first set.
    - 2.57 minutes in the second set.
  - Average number of hits per person per point in the first set was 1.65 shots.
  - Average number of hits per person per point in the second set was 1.54 shots.

# Actual Playing Time and Actual Number of Shots

- Graf vs. Sabatini
  - Total number of hits for the three set match was 1,567. Broken down for each set:
    - Set One - 3.8 hits per person, per point.
    - Set Two - 4.12 hits per person, per point.
    - Set Three - 3.25 hits.
  - Implications: You will spend the majority of your time in a tennis match off task.

# Celic vs. Zverev

## Second Set - First Four Games

### 2018 Rome

Game	Total Time	Time on Task	Time off Task	%	Server	Points Played
1	147'	75.88'	71.12'	48.37	Z (L)	5
2	124'	65.55'	58.45'	47.13	C (W)	6
3	144'	76.74'	67.26'	46.71	Z (W)	6
4	213'	124.12'	88.88'	41.73	C (W)	5

# Between Point Psychology

Slaikeu and Trogolo (1998) developed the 3-*R*'s approach to managing off task time:

1. *Release* – Let go of what just happened.
2. *Review* – Evaluate what is happening, self-regulate (stress management), and self-coaching.
3. *Refocus* – Engage in a serve or return ritual to transition from off-task to on-task.

# Release



# Between Point Psychology



## Phase I: Release

- Purpose – to help you maintain a here and now focus during your match.
  - Holding on to a mistake will interfere with your concentration and performance.
- Tip – Make your release relevant to the situation.
  - Don't have to be positive, but always be constructive.

# Types of Releases

<i><b>Constructive</b></i>	<i><b>Destructive</b></i>
Corrective Comments	Focusing on Outcome
Pump Up Words	Pessimism
Positive Body Language	Poor body language.
Constructive Private Thoughts	Negative and Critical Private Thoughts
Complimenting Your Opponent	Putting down your opponent.
Humor	Suffering in silence and live with your disappointment and frustration.
Rehearse the correct shot.	No rehearsal.

# Phase I: Release

**Let out your  
frustration, it  
usually doesn't  
do you any good  
to hold it in.**

**Once you let it  
out, let it go.**



# Phase I: Release

**Rehearse the shot correctly if you missed it, this is a very effective way of letting go an unforced error.**



# Phase I: Release

Rehearse the shot correctly if you missed it, this is another very effective way of releasing.



# Review

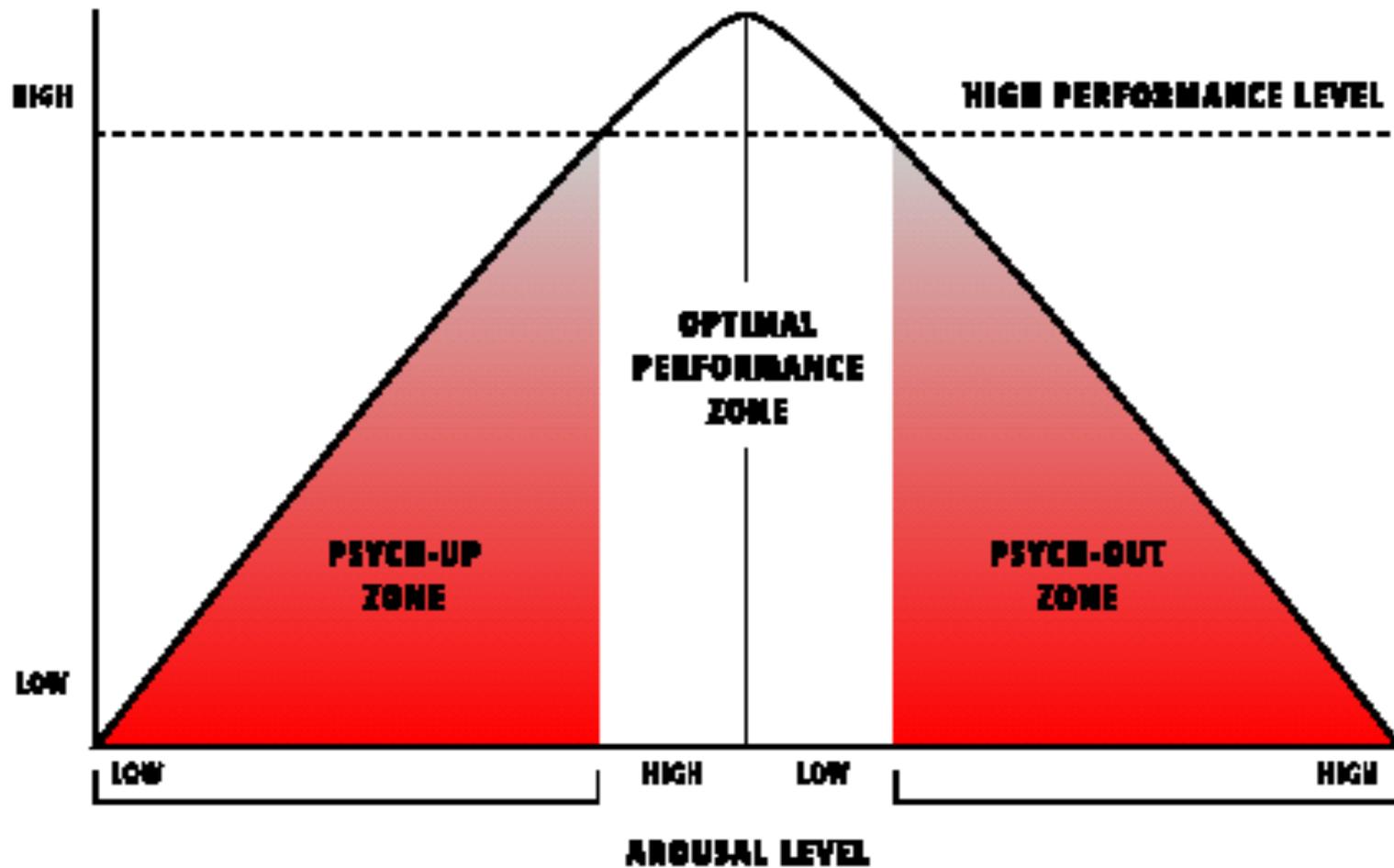


# Between Point Psychology

## Phase II: Review

- Purpose – to help you evaluate the match and self-regulate.
  - Self-regulation (Stress Management): Assess your energy level.
    - Do I need to relax?
    - Do I need to pump-up?
    - Is my energy positive or negative?
  - Match Strategy: Ask coach like questions.
    - Is my strategy working?
    - Is there any thing I need to change?
- Tip – When starting your review move the racquet to your non-dominant hand, straighten out your strings, take three deep breaths.
  - Consult your inner-coach.

# Performance and Arousal (Energy) Level



# Phase II: Review

**Look at your strings as you start your review.**

**Check your emotional state and tactics.**

**Make adjustments and changes if necessary.**



# Phase II: Review



Tying your shoes is a good tactic to calm down and change the pace of the match if it is getting away from you.

# Phase II: Review



**Toweling off is a good thing to do during the review.**

# Phase II: Review

**Focusing on your strings is also helpful during the review and some players also move their racquet to their non-dominant hand.**



# Phase II: Review

**Ask yourself: Is my strategy solid and I am just not executing or do I need to change a losing game?**



# Phase II: Review



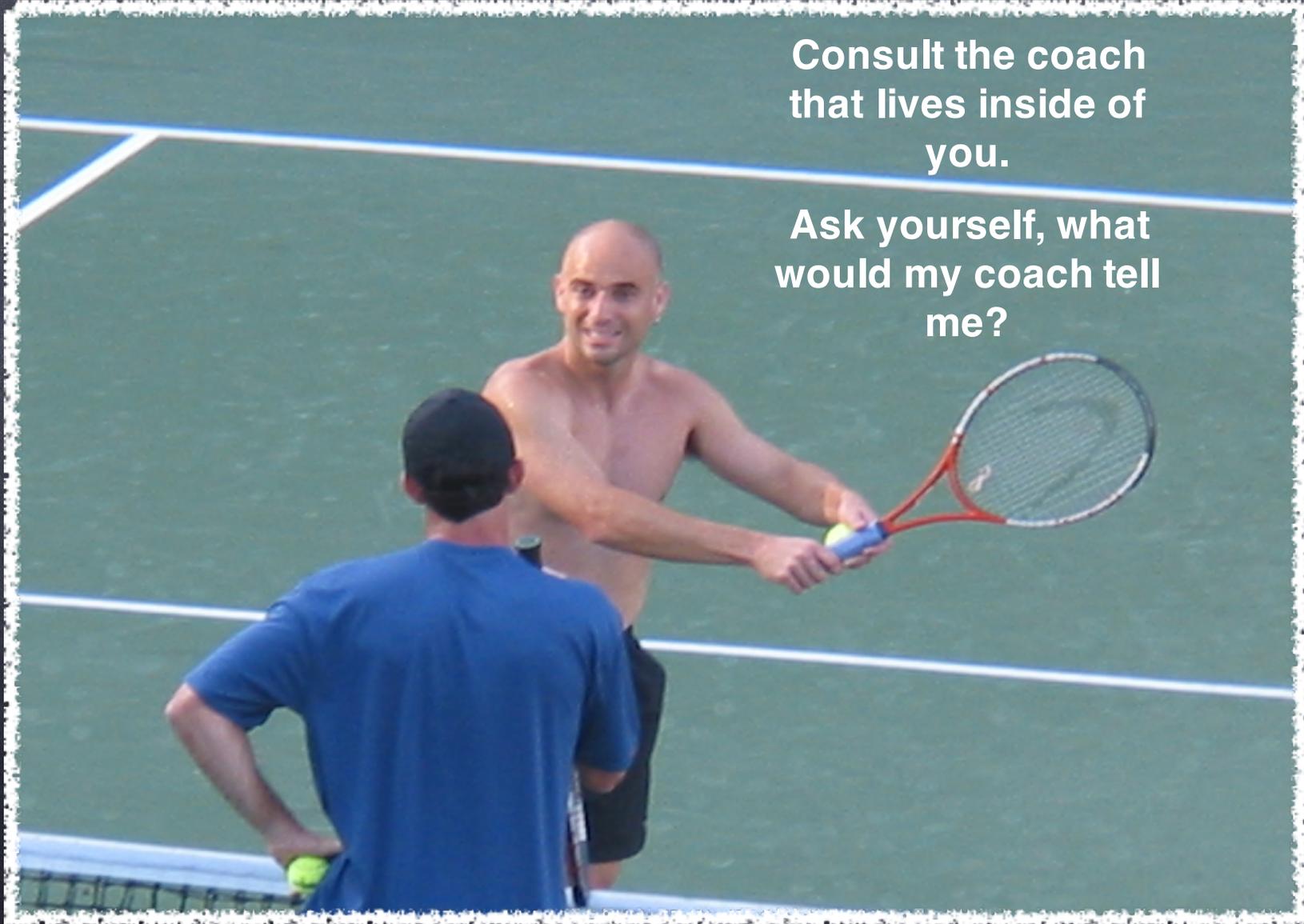
**Assess your  
physical state and  
attitude.**

**Be on the look out  
for your inner critic.**

# Phase II: Self-Coaching

Consult the coach  
that lives inside of  
you.

Ask yourself, what  
would my coach tell  
me?



# Phase II: Review – Doubles

In doubles it is best to do the review shoulder to shoulder with your doubles partner on every point.



# Phase II: Review – Double



Make a suggestion regarding a new tactic if things aren't going well.

# Phase II: Review - Doubles



**Walk confidently,  
shoulder to shoulder.**

# Phase II: Review – Doubles



**Make a suggestion  
regarding a new  
tactic if things aren't  
going well.**

# Phase II: Review - Review



**Discuss what  
you intend to do  
on the next point.**

# Phase II: Review - Doubles

Stay with what has  
been working most of  
the time.



# Phase II: Review – Doubles

**If your partner  
is struggling  
be  
encouraging  
and  
reassuring.**



# Phase III: Refocus





## Phase III: Refocus

- Purpose – to make the transition from an inner directed focus to an external focus.
- Tips – Develop a consistent serve and return ritual.

# Use a Ritual to Transition to Playing



# Phase III: Refocus



**Develop a  
consistent  
service  
ritual.**

# Phase III: Refocus



**Pick your  
target  
before you  
serve.**

# Phase III: Refocus

**Slow down and relax,  
do not rush your  
serve.**

**This is the only stroke  
you have complete  
control over.**



Chin Up



# Phase III: Refocus



Pick your target.



Relax

# Phase III: Refocus



Relax your eyes.



Be right here, right now.



Consistent  
Ball Toss

# Phase III: Refocus



Have a serve return ritual.

# Phase III: Refocus



Be balanced and ready to move in either direction.

# A Review: Between Point Psychology

Phase	Purpose	Tips
<b>I. Release</b>	To let go of the point you have just played in order to bring your total focus to the next point you are going to play.	Make your release relevant to the situation. You don't have to be positive, but always be constructive.
<b>II. Review</b>	To self-regulate, and evaluate your strategy, to review what you are learning about your opponent, and to make adjustments, if necessary.	Look at your strings, or place your racquet in the other hand. Ask coach type questions.
<b>III. Refocus</b>	Initiate Your Serve or Return Ritual: To transition from off task to on task.	Develop a consistent serve and return routine.

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