

CONFIDENCE

“Some people say that I have an attitude...maybe I do. But I think that you have to. You have to believe in yourself when no one else does- that makes you a winner right there.”

Having confidence throughout a match is crucial to performing well. If the opponent is of a similar level, it is often confidence that determines the outcome of the match.

Players need to feel confident that their physical, technical, and mental abilities will not let them down under pressure. In reality, sport confidence can be an inconsistent and temporary variable.



Sport-confidence, with respect to tennis, can be defined as the degree of certainty players possess about their ability to be successful.

Sources of Sport-Confidence

Before attempting to improve a player's confidence, it is important to identify their sources of confidence. The inconsistency of sport confidence within a period of time is basically affected by the sources of the confidence. Players have multiple sources of confidence:

1. Mastery (Improving skills)
2. Demonstration of ability (Show ability by winning)
3. Physical/Mental preparation (Being prepared physically and mentally, stay focused on goals)
4. Physical self-presentation (Feel your body looks good)
5. Social support (Encouraged by coach/family)
6. Coach leadership (Know coach will make good decisions)
7. Vicarious experience (See friend perform successfully)
8. Environmental comfort (Feel comfortable in playing environment)
9. Situational favourableness (Feel everything "going right")

It may be helpful to consider the nine sources of sport-confidence within three broad categories:

- **Achievement** (includes both mastery and demonstration of ability) - players gain confidence when they achieve their goals.
- **Self-Regulation** (includes physical/mental preparation and physical self-presentation) - players gain confidence from engaging in effective self-regulation of cognitions and behaviour.
- **Climate** (includes the sources of social support, coaches' leadership, vicarious experience, environmental comfort and situational favourableness) - players gain confidence from training and competing in a competitive climate that is supportive, challenging, comfortable, and motivating.

Enhancing self-confidence

Self-confidence can be built through practice, planning and hard work. A few strategies for improving self-confidence are provided below:

- **Performance accomplishments**

The strongest builder of self-confidence is performance accomplishments. If you have performed a behaviour successfully in the past you will believe you can complete it again in the future.

The behaviour might be beating a particular opponent, coming from behind to win, serving an ace on a break-point or executing a passing shot perfectly under pressure.

- **Think confidently – positive self-talk**

Throughout a tennis match it is vital to keep thinking positively and confidently. If you think confidently, your body is more likely to act in a confident manner.

Players should attempt to eliminate all negative things that they might say or think. This means stopping such negative statements as 'I can't win', 'I can't believe I'm playing so bad', 'I hope I don't double fault', and changing them to more positive statements such as 'I know I can win this', 'I can hang in there' and 'Come on, next point'.

These positive statements should be instructive rather than judgemental because the body can translate these instructions into positive actions and better strokes.

- **Image success**

Imagery refers to visualising a particular action, event or strategy. Imagery can be used to see yourself accomplish something you are having difficulty with, such as beating a particular opponent or executing a certain shot successfully.

For example, if you are having trouble with your backhand passing shot up the line you might visualise yourself hitting a crisp passing shot under pressure. Imagery can help provide you with a feeling of success and confidence that might ordinarily be unavailable to you.

- **Act confidently – positive body language**

One of the easiest ways to build confidence is to act confidently. Because thoughts, feelings and behaviours all affect one another, the more you act confidently, the more likely you are to feel and think confidently.

Acting confidently not only makes you feel better, but it can be very disconcerting to your opponent.