

Inside Coaching

Competitive Fight + Emotional Control = Competitive Balance

By Ben Loeb, USPTA

Picture yourself walking across a tightrope with your hands out to each side to help your balance.

On one hand is "Competitive Fight" and on the other hand is "Emotional Control." In competitive athletics and specifically in a tennis match you need both. Competitive fight without emotional control will leave you frustrated and angry. You will not be at your best to solve problems in the match. If you have emotional control but not enough competitive fight, you will be playing the match while driving in neutral. That's not good enough to get to where you want to go against strong competition. You need positive energy to fuel the competitive fight. Consequently, strive to have proper emotional balance by having a combination of both competitive fight and emotional control.

A helpful acronym in the form of a question during competition is "Are you 'CALM' in the storm of competition?"

- C** – Are you *Centered* in the here and now?
- A** – Are you *Accepting* of what is?
- L** – Are you *Logical* in your thinking?
- M** – Are you *Mindful* of your next move?

As a player on the court or as a person dealing with life, you are more likely to have emotional balance if you are centered in the here and now; accepting of what is; logical in your thinking; and mindful of your next move. So stay "CALM" in the heat of competition.

Another key to emotional balance is composure. Composure is something easier said than done when faced with obstacles, especially when the outcome is in doubt. This applies on and off the tennis court or any athletic field of play as well as in dealing with life's obstacles. Ask yourself, "how well am I dealing with mistakes on and off the court?" "How well do I handle things when

things are not going as planned?" Keep in mind the 3 R's for Composure.

Recognize you are dwelling on mistakes
Regroup by interrupting the chain of thought
Refocus on the next play/move.

You can get back into emotional balance faster if you keep the 3 R's in mind during the battle. It's hard enough to battle your opponent. Why are you spending so much energy battling yourself? You could repeat the 3 R's to yourself ("Recognize-Regroup-Refocus") between points to change your perspective if need be.

If we can find the proper emotional balance we will discover a better version of ourselves on and off the tennis court.

A final key ties emotional balance with viewing the situation as a great opportunity. So many of us become obsessed with the outcome. We want to win! The opponent wants to win, too! Now that we have the "given" part out of the way, we can focus on viewing the situation as a great opportunity to be part of the contest, the game, the unknown. It's an opportunity for challenge, for self-discovery and if you are part of a team, for achievement for all. Can you look at the situation as an opportunity for play, for exercise, for testing your mental, emotional and physical skills against someone else? You can choose to see the opportunity as part of the reward. The opportunity can be a gift in itself and winning can enhance the feeling of accomplishment. But either way you or your team can choose to put yourself

out there and get something worthwhile out of the experience. This one is probably too long for automatic recall but it can be reviewed during quiet times of reflection.

Look for your OPPORTUNITY in sport and in life.

- O** – *Open* to self-discovery
- P** – *Passionate*
- P** – *Persistent*
- O** – *Opposition* (you can deal with it)
- R** – *Responsible*
- T** – *Trustworthy* (be trustworthy with others)
- U** – *Unity* (respect differences and value things in common)
- N** – *Nourish* your relationships with other people
- I** – *Introspective* (honestly look at yourself)
- T** – *Transformation* (you can welcome and handle life's changes, good and bad)
- Y** – *You* count, too!

When you have opportunities in sport, you get the chance to play. If in life, you get the chance to participate. That's a good thing. There may be some people who are opposed to you being successful out of envy, jealousy or resentment. You cannot let them stop you from pursuing the "opportunity" for your own success. Be thankful for the opportunity in itself and allow that to help you with your own emotional balance.

If we can find the proper emotional balance, we will discover a better version of ourselves on and off the tennis court. ☺



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