Dr. Allen Fox earned a Ph.D. in psychology at UCLA and is a former NCAA champion, Wimbledon quarterfinalist, a three-time member of the U.S. Davis Cup team, and coached the Pepperdine tennis team to two NCAA finals. He currently consults with tennis players on mental issues, appears in his popular 1-Minute Clinics on the Tennis Channel, and lectures world-wide on sports psychology.

He is the author of three previous books, “IF I’M THE BETTER PLAYER, WHY CAN’T I WIN?”, “THINK TO WIN,” and “THE WINNER’S MIND, a Competitor’s Guide to Sports and Business Success.” Dr. Fox is an editor and writer for Tennis Magazine and for his web site, allenfoxtennis.net.

Tennis is more difficult mentally than most other sports. Because of its one on one personal nature, it feels more important than it is. Competitive matches can become highly stressful, and losing is painful. Emotions tend to get out of hand, with fears and nerves becoming difficult to control. Confidence comes and goes; the scoring system is diabolical; and everyone is at risk of choking, even the greatest players in the world. This book attacks these and other issues faced by players of all levels. Dr. Allen Fox’s solutions are logical and straightforward, and most importantly, they have been tested on court and they work.

WHAT’S IN IT?

CHAPTER 1: WHY DO WE WANT TO WIN?  Winning a tennis match feels more important than it is because players are genetically wired to compete for position on the social hierarchy. The emotions of a tennis match resemble those of a fight. Players may realize that winning a match doesn’t really matter, but they will always want to win anyway.
CHAPTER 2: THE EMOTIONAL ISSUES OF COMPETITION: Tennis is inherently an emotional game. Because match outcomes feel important but are ultimately uncontrollable, matches can become stressful. There is often an unconscious urge to escape this stress, which leads to counterproductive behaviors, among which are anger, tanking, and excuse-making. These can be overpowered by the conscious mind, but it requires understanding, high motivation, and constant effort.

CHAPTER 3: USING EMOTION TO HELP YOU WIN: Your emotions will dramatically affect your tennis performance. We discuss how to keep counterproductive emotions in check and how to create productive ones that will help you win. Topics include the use of adrenalin, profiting from the time between points, and maintaining an optimal excitation level.

CHAPTER 4: REDUCING THE STRESS: Matches can become overly stressful, and this hinders performance. Stress can be reduced by developing a more realistic perspective of the game. Included are accepting outcomes that can’t be controlled; resisting a narrow focus on winning; avoiding excessive perfectionism; getting over losses quickly; and using goals for hope and motivation rather than allowing them to become expectations and cause stress.

CHAPTER 5: THE PROBLEMS OF FINISHING: Most players become nervous and stressed when they are ahead and face the hurdle of finishing the match against a dangerous opponent. The unique tennis scoring system intensifies this problem. The closer players get to winning, the greater the stress. Trying to reduce it gives rise to counterproductive behaviors such as procrastinating the finish or becoming “overconfident” and easing up with a lead.

CHAPTER 6: CHOKING - ITS CAUSES AND HOW TO MINIMIZE ITS EFFECTS: Choking is most frequent at the finish of games, sets, and matches due to the uncertainty of outcome. You can limit choking damage by immediate acceptance of this uncertainty. Avoid stressful thoughts of winning by using rituals, focusing, and relaxation techniques. Rid yourself of the idea that choking will make you lose, and recognize that there are usually multiple opportunities to win, not just one.

CHAPTER 7: CONFIDENCE AND HOW TO GET IT IF YOU DON’T HAVE IT: Confidence, aka self-belief, comes mostly from winning. Though it’s more difficult, you can win without it by replacing it with sufficient emotional discipline. Slumps and hot streaks occur in cycles and both end naturally with time. Stressing over a slump prolongs it. You can speed its ending by several methods which we discuss.

CHAPTER 8: GAME PLANS: Game plans give your efforts direction and structure. They can rely primarily on offence or defense but should be consistent with your personality. With Plan A you are looking for a match-up where you have a relative advantage, most commonly pitting your strengths against your opponent’s weaknesses. With Plan B, which you always employ simultaneously with Plan A, you attempt to tire your opponent mentally.

CHAPTER 9: BREAKING DOWN YOUR OPPONENT MENTALLY: You can weaken your opponent mentally by using dominance techniques. Be aware of momentum development – maintain it when you’re winning and break it when you aren’t. Take advantage of the let-downs that occur in transitional situations: at the end of sets, after long points, after service breaks, and after long games. Learn to resist becoming psyched out by opponents.

CHAPTER 10: MAINTAINING MENTAL EFFECTIVENESS IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE: Remember the Golden Rule of tennis: Never do anything on court that doesn’t help you win. Decide beforehand how you will handle the frustrations and errors that are likely to occur during match play. Understand the value of intensity and its role in
playing percentage tennis. Players who have beaten you too frequently get into your head. Beating them requires exceptional emotional discipline and focus. Learn to deal with injuries, both yours and those of your opponents.

CHAPTER 11: THE VALUE OF OPTIMISM: Being optimistic is always helpful during competition. If it does not occur naturally you can become more optimistic by deliberately focusing on the real positives that exist in every situation. Monitor your thoughts and be alert to negative ones. When one occurs replace it immediately with a positive one. A bad attitude is difficult to change in mid-match, so make sure to start out with a good one. When you are behind, hope is your most crucial asset, and it is always realistic.

CHAPTER 12: DEVELOPING YOUR GAME AND THE ROLE OF PARENTS: Tennis is a difficult game and not enjoyable until you can control the ball with some level of consistency. The “middle game” is the heart of any player’s game, and is learned by intelligent, repetitious practice, Tennis should generally be made fun for beginning youngsters, but some little push may occasionally be necessary. Tournaments can be motivating for kids, but they are stressful for parents and can impel even a good parent to act improperly.

CHAPTER 13: COURAGE AND HIGHER VALUES: Competing successfully in tennis is helped by focusing on character development rather than on winning. Everybody wants to win anyway. Working to develop higher values such as courage, unselfishness, consideration for others, appreciation, and morality is good for your character and will, as a by-product, reduce your stress and help you win.

CHAPTER 14: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DOUBLES: An important doubles skill is the ability to make your partner play better. You affect your partner’s emotional state and level of play with your gestures and words. Champions are not concerned with parceling out blame for a loss; rather they are focused on doing what it takes to win. You can also disrupt the opposing team by attacking the weaker player and by intimidation.

To purchase this book, please visit allenfoxtennis.net
Tennis: Winning the Mental Match

Tennis is more difficult mentally than most other sports. It feels more important than it is; it has a diabolical scoring system; drawn-out competitive matches are highly stressful; and losing can be very painful. During competition emotions get out of hand, fears and nerves are hard to control, and confidence comes and goes. This book attacks these and other issues faced by players of all levels. Dr. Allen Fox’s solutions are logical and straightforward, and most importantly, they have been tested on court and they work.

Allen Fox, Ph.D. won the NCAA singles while earning his B.A. in physics and being named All-UCLA and All-University of California Athlete of the Year. He remained at UCLA to earn a Ph.D. in psychology, and as a graduate student was a 3-time member of the US Davis Cup team, reached the Wimbledon quarter-finals, and won titles including the U.S. National Hard-courts, Canadian Nationals, and Cincinnati.

Dr. Fox coached the Pepperdine University teams to top-five NCAA rankings for 10 consecutive years. He presently coaches Igor Kunitsyn (career high of #35) on the ATP tour, and has consulted on strategic/psychological issues with players of all levels, including pros, elite juniors, and recreational players.

Dr. Fox has authored two other books on tennis, “If I’m the Better Player, Why Can’t I Win?” and “Think to Win,” and a book on generalized achievement, “The Winner’s Mind” (USRSA, 2005). He writes for “Tennis Magazine” and is a sought-after public speaker, having appeared at the national conferences of the USTA, USPTA, and PTR, and on the Tennis Channel with his popular One-Minute Clinics on psychology.

“I have long respected Allen Fox’s ideas and sound judgment. His unique and insightful book on the mental game is simple, practical, and will certainly help you play better.”
- Tracy Austin, 2-time U.S. Open winner and former world’s #1

“I consider Allen to be one of the most widely-respected people in the country on the mental game. I have worked alongside him at elite USTA junior training camps, and his ideas are straightforward and practical. I highly recommend his book to players of all levels.”
- Jay Berger, USTA Head of Men’s Tennis & former world’s #2 player

“Allen is very smart. What I learned from him at Pepperdine helped me greatly as a player and coach, some of it I was able to use, but it didn’t completely sink in until years after I left school.”
- Brad Gilbert, coach of Agassi, Roddick, and Murray
YOUR GAME WILL FOLLOW YOUR EMOTIONS

BOOK EXERPT FROM “TENNIS: WINNING THE MENTAL MATCH”

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When you feel good, you are apt to play well; conversely, when you feel bad, you are likely to play poorly. Sport psychologists talk about the need to control emotion on court, but what they mean by this is not simply suppressing emotions (like anger or depression). They refer instead to an optimum strategy by which players not only rid themselves of negative emotions but also to create positive ones.

As an example of the power of emotion to affect athletic performance, consider the issue of home court advantage, which is mostly an emotional advantage. In the major professional sports leagues the home teams had the following winning percentages: baseball – 53% (1991-2002), hockey – 55% (1998-2003), football – 58% (2001-2005), and basketball – 61% (2001-2006). Many explanations have been offered including variations in days of rest, sleep, travel-fatigue, etc. but the most important factors seem to be largely emotional - familiarity with the playing field or court and the influence of the crowd. This is supported by noting that in the NBA the winning percentages for the home teams are usually greatest in the playoffs, where the crowds are larger and louder than they are during the regular season. These effects are obviously mostly psychological, since the size of the court, the height of the basket, and the bounce of the ball are the same as they were during the regular season, and are basically the same from arena to arena. The screaming support of the home fans effects the player’s emotions and helps the home team play better and the visitors play worse.
During tennis competition, as with the other sports, positive emotions help but do not guarantee good play. This fact tends to confuse players, because they often find that they still lose matches even after disciplining their emotions positively and well. So they start to think emotional control has no value. And they are dead wrong! Even though good emotions do not ever guarantee a victory, bad emotions often guarantee a loss. Emotions only set the stage for the quality of play that follows, but they don’t control it. Good emotions only make good play more likely; they don’t guarantee anything. Finally, emotional effects on tennis performance are often overlooked because they may be small, sometimes only a difference of a point or two here and there, which are hardly noticeable. (But these few points, in a close match, often make the difference between winning and losing.)

**Habits, repetitions, and our strokes:** Our strokes are controlled by sequences of muscle memories that are programmed into the nervous system through repetition in practice. The more correct repetitions, the more accurate the programming and the more likely the stroke is to function properly in competition. Optimal tactical responses to an opponent’s shots during play are also programmed into our nervous systems by reward and punishment during past competition. For example, when we hit the right shot and win the point and, in the same situation, hit the wrong shot and lose the point, our nervous systems record this information and use it later to improve shot selection. Eventually the strokes and immediate tactical responses are no longer under conscious control in matches. They function by habit and come out too quickly for conscious thought. Of course at the conscious level we need to have game plans and remain sensitive to how well they are working in order to make effective adjustments, but this is all superimposed upon the set of basic programmed habits and responses that function below the
level of conscious thought.

Now for the punch line: these habits and programmed responses are substantially affected by strong emotion. They are disrupted by negative emotions (and negative thought processes that ultimately produce negative emotions) like anger, depression, fear, and pessimism. On the other hand, they are helped by positive emotions (and positive thought processes that ultimately produce positive emotions) like optimism, controlled aggression, feelings of confidence, strength and courage, and optimal levels of arousal. Even when the effects are small they often make the difference between victory and defeat.

*Don’t let your emotions be controlled by what is happening on court.* In competition, the top pros spend most of their time between points striving to eliminate negative emotions and create positive ones. This requires an emotional plan and the discipline to implement it regardless of negative events that may occur during match play. The less successful players allow their emotions to be determined by what is happening on court. This is an unstable and circular situation in that their emotions are controlled by events (which are out of their control) rather than by themselves. Here bad play produces bad emotions which in turn produce further bad play. The trick in maximizing performance and reducing its variability is for the player to produce positive emotions before every point, independent of what is happening on court.

Although a detailed treatise on creating positive emotions is beyond the scope of this chapter, the essence of the process is that you begin by having no emotion at all at the end of a point. (Don’t allow anything that happens on court to shake you in any way.) Then, starting from an
emotionally neutral position, you consciously and deliberately (through visualization, positive interpretation of events on court, self-exhortation, etc.) work to conjure up positive emotions before the next point starts. This will set the stage properly and increase your odds of playing well when the next point begins.