WINNING UGLY – BRAD GILBERT

Smart Tennis is a Three-Step Process
1. Recognize your opportunity.
2. Analyze your options.
3. Capitalize on the opportunity by using the best option.

The Game Plan.
1. What do I want to make happen?
2. What do I want to prevent from happening?

Answer these questions:
• What is my opponent’s best weapon?
• Where is my opponent weak?
• What is my best shot and how can I direct it at my opponent’s weakness?
• What can I do to keep my opponent away from my own weakness?

Things to bring to a match:
1. Water or sport drink. Drink every change over.
2. Energy food. Energy bars, bananas, oranges, etc. Don’t lose because of lack of energy.
4. Hat or visor. Keep the sun out of your eyes.
5. Sunglasses. You might be serving into the sun.
6. Towel. Wipe sweat off you and your grip.
8. Extra Grips. If you use over-grips have extra in case the one you’re using gets soaked.
9. Sweatbands. If you sweat a lot, you can use them on the court.
10. Tape / Band-Aids. In case you get a blister.
Don’t lose a match because you weren’t prepared with the right equipment. No one ever lost for having too much equipment available.

LEARN ABOUT YOUR OPPONENT DURING WARMUP.
1. Do they run around their backhand?
2. What is their weaker stroke?
3. When their at the net, hit a lob. How do they cover it?
4. Make a mental note of things you might want to attack during the match.

Nervous before a match? Try these things to calm down during warm-ups.
1. Take smooth, rhythmic, deep breaths.
3. Read the label. Try to lead the label on the ball as it comes towards you.
4. Sing a song under your breath.

How to get the best possible start to a match.
1. Never serve first.
2. Play the first two games correctly.
   a. 75%-80% power.
   b. No unforced errors.
   c. On your serve, get the ball in and to their weak side.
   d. Don’t relax if you win the first game, concentrate on winning your serve.
3. Take a drink on changeover and review your strategy.
How to beat the pusher.
A pusher is someone who just keeps hitting the ball back in play with very little pace.
1. You must be patient. Be prepared for a long match. Prepare mentally for long points.
2. Attack the net on short balls.
3. Bring the pusher to the net. Hit short shots.
4. Hit soft. Don’t over hit.
5. Hit your second server first. Make them put pace on the ball.

How to beat the player with speed.
Speedy player runs everything down, you make mistakes trying to hit a better winner.
1. Hit deep down the middle.
2. Don’t over hit trying to hit winners they can’t get to.

How to beat the player that attacks the backhand.
(Every short ball the player attacks to the backhand)
1. Make them prove they can hit volleys.
2. Run around your backhand when you can.
3. Attack the net when you get the opportunity.
4. Attack their second serve.
5. Lob

How to beat the serve and volley player.
Serves and volleys putting pressure on your return of serve.
1. Watch the ball not the player.
2. Hit your return cross court.
3. Hit a hard return right at the opponent.
4. Hit a soft return to see how they handle it.
5. Lob.
6. Vary your shots.

How to beat a player with a weak serve.
1. Move up closer to the service line.
2. Keep your feet moving.
3. Shorten your backswing.
4. Power is less important than placement.

How to beat a lefty with big spin serve.
1. Move into the alley on the ad court to return serve.
2. Don’t be intimidated by the left hander.

How to beat the big server.
1. Move back three steps.
2. Move in three steps
3. Cut your swing in half.
The Seven Hidden Ad Points.

1. **The Set-up Point.**
   - Win the point that gets you to add. 30-30, 30-0, 30-15. Focus, extra concentration.
   - Get the ball in or get it back. Play high percentage shots.

2. **The Set-up Game.**
   - Win the game at 4-4, 5-5. Don’t force shots. Don’t get impatient. Play percentage tennis.

3. **The Dictate Games.**
   - Win the first two games of the set.
   - Don’t let a player back in after winning the first set.
   - Keep the pressure on, keep them down.
   - Don’t become complacent with a big lead.

4. **Stretching a Lead.**
   - Stay aggressive. Don’t speed up your play, stay in your pace. Pretend you’re behind.

5. **Stopping the Match From Slipping Away.**
   - Slow things down. Change your game plan.

6. **Tiebreaker Tactics.**
   - Don’t rush. Be deliberate. Play high percentage tennis.

7. **Closing out a match.**
   - Expect your opponent to raise their game. No mistakes. No free points. No stupid shots.

THE MENTAL GAME – WINNING AT PRESSURE TENNIS – JAMES E. LOEHR

The single most important thing you can do to perform at your peak is to trigger this ideal performance state. Rest assured this special state is not the result of playing well; it is precisely what makes playing well possible. When you feel right, you can perform right, and controlling how you feel is a learned skill.

Next, reduce the pressure to win without putting out the fire. The goal of winning at any cost is replaced with playing the very best you can at every moment. Simply focus on giving 100 percent physically and emotionally on every point, and let winning take care of itself.

**Play every point as though it were the most important one of the match.** If every point is of the same importance, there should be no such thing as big points. Every point should get your maximum effort, and every point is a pressure point. Soon you will start handling the pressure better.

**The tougher the situation, the more you should love it.** Pressure is what triggers choking. Getting inspired when your back is against the wall is what transforms the pressure into productive energy. If you are loving it, choking is out of the question.

**When in doubt, go for it!** When things get shaky, it’s better to be aggressive than safe.
**Improve your strokes that fold under pressure.** If your serve is the first thing to go, modify your technique and increase your margin for error. If the same stroke always goes south, it’s more likely that the stroke needs fixing, not your head.

**Focus on each point, one at a time.** Work hard to play each point as though it were the first and last. There is no past and future there is only the present.

If you become obsessed with winning, you’ll probably lose. Simply focus on doing the very best you can at every moment. Winning will take care of itself.

During your match, no whining, no excuses, no negative self-talk.

Don’t link winning with success and losing with failure. You may have experienced great success and still lost. Pair success with effort and learning. Ask yourself, “Did I give my best effort, and did I do my best to be positive?”

**The hardest part of competitive tennis is not learning the strokes, but rather learning to use your strokes under pressure.** To become the best you can be, you must develop both physical and mental strength, and mental strength, because it’s so much more intangible, is always the toughest. So every time you practice or play a match, work hard on the mental skills: staying relaxed, calm, positive, and energized.

Players with clearly defined rituals tend to hold up better under pressure of match play than those without.

Rituals help you deepen concentration; play more instinctively, stay relaxed, and raise intensity levels just before starting a point.

Improving your ability to visualize and plan what you want to do on the next point; visualizing what you want to have happen, not what you don’t want to happen prior to the start of the point.

**Tips for improving your performance between points:**

1. **Eye control.** Keep your eyes on your strings, the ground, or the ball to keep your attention focused between points.
2. **Rituals.** Establish rituals between and before points to appropriately balance relaxation, focus, and intensity.
3. **Winning pace.** Establish a winning pace between points, especially when angry, nervous, or fatigued, to regain emotional and physiological balance.
4. **Breathing.** Practice deep breathing between points to help relax and lower pulse rate. Breathe out at ball contact to get better control, relaxation, and feel.
5. **High positive intensity.** Even when you feel very fatigued or negative, project the image of having a high level of positive intensity. Fake it!
6. **Calmness and relaxation.** When nervous and tense, try to project the image of being relaxed and calm. Actively relax your muscles between points.
7. **Negative self-talk.** Avoid expressing negative self-talk during play. It only fosters bad results and pumps up your opponent.
8. **Positive attitude.** Think positively about your situation in the face of adversity. Become challenged.
9. **Love the battle.** Don’t appear scared, threatened, or unhappy when things get tough; project a challenged and winning appearance at all times.
When you're ahead 5-1 in a set, how do keep from losing it?  
At 5-1 or 5-2, your opponent has nothing to lose, so he often starts going for broke. The player who is down often starts playing more aggressively, loses his nervousness, and plays better. Players who are ahead tend to become nervous and start playing conservatively, trying not to lose. The combination often results in the lead player dropping the next game or two, maybe even the set. Two things are important here: First, never be surprised when your opponent hits a great shot or two at this time; expect it. The level of your opponent’s game is likely to rise. Don’t panic – it’s only temporary. Second, resist strongly the temptation to play conservative tennis. Try to reverse things in your mind and play as if you’re down 1-5. Keep playing the way you did to get ahead 5-1. Be aggressive.

The thought of losing doesn’t bother me now. It only bothers me if I haven’t given 100-percent effort. So the pressure is off. If I lose, I lose. I now know that if I stay positive and keep working, my talent will eventually come out.

Being a mentally tough competitor means controlling how you feel inside. Three primary strategies accomplish that. The first is controlling what you think; the second is controlling what you visualize; the third is controlling how you look on the outside, in short, your physical presence. Make a commitment to improve your physical image every time you play or practice your sport. Improve your walk, your appearance of intensity, and your look of aggressiveness. Athletes rarely, if ever, train in this area, yet my experience reveals its importance in building mental toughness.

One reason why we outwardly display negative emotions is to let everyone around us, including our opponent, know that we’re really much better than we’re playing. We want them to know that we’re “off” and are capable of much more. “If I don’t show I’m upset, they’ll think that’s how I play all the time.” That strategy may appear to save your ego or pride, but it will eventually undermine you. Indeed, you rarely convince anyone, including your opponents, and you end up locking in the negative feelings. You continue to feel precisely like you act – miserable, upset, and negative. The performance consequences of those feelings are clear. Furthermore, when an athlete acts negatively, he often raises the confidence level of his opponents.

The message is clear. When the feelings aren’t there, start acting “as if” they were.