



DREW'S DROP SHOTS

LEE DREW is a high performance coach for England Squash and Racketball, with special responsibility for the under-19 squads as well as fulfilling the liaison role with the regional coaches. Here he addresses key coaching issues in the sport

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOLO

Every elite player who has ever hit a squash ball – from Jonah Barrington to Nick Matthew – has one thing in common: they have all hit tens of thousands of purposeful shots on their own.

The discipline is referred to as “solo” and you will often hear players talking of “grooving”. This is the act of getting the swing to take the same path over and over again, so that it becomes an automatic action when under pressure in a match. There are two types of solo that professionals use: structured target hitting and flowing expression.

For example, Nick will solo at least once or twice per week and it will feature incredible attention to detail. The two kinds of solo Nick uses are: a long and structured format that progresses through different

types of shots, working on hitting targets at the front and back of the court; and a far more expressive, free-flowing and random format with less structure.

Nick explained: “I always do a lot of figure of eight drills both on the floor and off the volley. I also work on my deception as much as possible. Sometimes if I am working on a specific thing with DP [Nick’s coach, David Pearson], I will try to slow that solo down and play fewer shots but with more attention to detail. Other times I might hit around at a faster tempo and throw in some ghosting. Over the years I have tried to up the percentage of work I do to the front two corners along with deception work in my solos.”

If there is a spare side court at an event, keep your eyes peeled, as you will often see Nick getting a bit of extra solo practice in. The message here is



Nick Matthew puts in hours of solo practice

that hitting thousands of squash balls on your own is not enough; it is how you hit them that counts.

Tips for club players:

- Use targets, either actual or imaginary, but know your target

- Use solo to understand what effect the strings have on the ball
 - To groove your swing, make sure that you break down the swing path so that it starts to go exactly where you want it to
 - Start simply and build up the practice; give yourself easy targets and practices to start with.
- Practices for club players:
- 10 consecutive shots into the service box on both

- sides
- Volleys starting from the front of the court, moving slowly backwards in blocks of 10 shots
- Consecutive drives into the back corner. Give yourself a target (maybe start with half of the service box width, with the ball landing behind the service box). How many can you do?

- Free-flowing short practice. Stand in front of or on the short line and feed the ball up for yourself, express yourself by taking the ball in short into either front corner in different ways.

Handling NERVES

FIVE WAYS TO USE NERVES TO YOUR ADVANTAGE EXPLAINS PERFORMANCE SPECIALIST **ALLISTAIR MCCAW**

Do you get nervous before a match or before competing? Then good, because even the very best athletes in the world get nervous too!

Many times I’ve been in the gym or locker room and witnessed players like Novak [Djokovic], Rafa [Nadal] and Roger [Federer] warming up before a match and let me tell you, they aren’t as relaxed as you might think. In Rafa’s book he mentions that he has at least four toilet stops before going onto court! In fact, I’ve worked with two world no.1 players in both

tennis and squash, and witnessed nerves first hand.

Many times I get asked: “Allistair, how do I get rid of nerves?” My answer is: “Why do you want to get rid of something so vital to performing well?”

Change your mindset about them. Many people see nerves as a ‘negative’ thing or something that can hurt their performance, the reason being that they have taught themselves to think that way. However, to most world-class athletes, it’s seen as ‘ready to go’ adrenaline that’s necessary for their performance. What

these elite athletes also do incredibly well is keep a confident and calm composure on the outside. They never look nervous.

Five reasons why you should embrace nerves:

1. You see them as a sign from your body that you’re



World-class athletes like Roger Federer see nerves as ‘ready to go’ adrenaline

ready to compete. It’s positive, ‘ready to go’ adrenaline

2. Even the very best athletes in the world get them before a match
3. They’re telling you that something great is going to happen out there today!
4. Your opponent is probably even more nervous than you, except you know how to handle nerves better
5. If you didn’t get nervous, then what you were doing wouldn’t mean that much or be that special to you.

So my message is this:

Embrace nerves and remember that even the champions get them. Emulate these champions by looking confident next time you walk out onto the court and know that you are ready to compete!