

Embracing Fears

[00:00](#) J: Welcome to the compete like a champion podcast. You're here with Dr. Larry Lauer, mental skills specialist, and coach Johnny Parkes with USTA player development. In today's episode we're going to talk about embracing fears, big part of the psychology around tennis in any sport. This is an exciting topic.

[00:23](#) L: Yeah. Scary topic. A very scary topic.

[00:25](#) J: Maybe we should have done it over Halloween.

[00:28](#) L: We should have! We can do another one over Halloween. Today is just all about you, Johnny. We're going to talk about your fears and have a, a live therapy session.

[00:37](#) J: A live therapy session. I'm not sure I'm ready for this. Well that's why I didn't tell you this is what we're doing.

[00:42](#) L: And next time will be Amy Barnhart. We're going to have her.

[00:46](#) J: Yes.

[00:48](#) L: Live. All right. Now that we're off topic already. 10 seconds in.

[00:52](#) J: All right. Embracing fears. So it's a term concept that we talk a lot about in sports. I think the more individualistic the sport gets, the more we talk about embracing fears, uh, as you get more outside of the team environment. But going back to some of our recent meetings, we had a guest speaker with David Rutherford who's a Navy seal. He has a podcast. What's his, what's his podcast?

[01:14](#) L: Never quit.

[01:14](#) J: Never quit podcast. Team never quit. And you know, it was really fascinating as this guy came in and delivered what I thought it was an amazing, amazing speech and amazing, an amazing session where, you know, you look at this Navy seal, you're thinking, you know, this guy's not really scared of anything. He's, you know, walked, walk past bullets. He's dodged bullets, he's faced the most horrible human beings probably that he's ever had to face and been in the most horrible environments that he's had to be. And he talked about that to us and, you know, the amazing thing is he talked about fear, you know, fear is the driver of everything, basically everything that we do, and it's a perfectly normal thing. It's a perfectly natural thing. But I know you've spent a little bit more time with him. You've probably seen him a lot, well, you've seen him a lot more than I have. And you know, what's your, what's your perspective on all of that?

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L: You know, I, I, we had David out for our preseason and it was great to have him and, and learn from him, learn from his stories, learn from someone who has faced fear, whether it's combat training, uh, in his life and he's very open and honest about it and really appreciate him for taking the time to teach us about, you know, some of the, the techniques and the philosophies that they might use as a Navy seal. And certainly, uh, we're going to continue to, I'll continue to communicate with him and learn more and more. But, you know, I think the first thing that, that comes to mind is that this idea of fear, it, it's such a strong, uh, emotion, a strong feeling state that can drive behavior, um, is driving behavior of a lot of people and unintentionally, cause we, we don't necessarily always think about our fears, but we're avoiding situations based on our fears. Uh, if you think about someone has a fear of enclosed places, they tend to try to be in bigger place. They try to stay outside, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but maybe they don't take the elevator, which again, maybe not necessarily a bad thing, uh, taking the stairs, but um, but it, it definitely dictates behavior and, and we're not always aware of it and I think one of the big messages from David that I took away was, we want to be directed by our mission.

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We want to be directed by our goals, our values, our expectations, and allow that to drive us. But fear moves in the way and it, because it's so powerful, it starts directing our behavior and we start maybe doing things that you know, aren't so good for us. And so that fear, you've got to, you gotta be aware of it for...

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J: Well like affecting decision making and choices you make and maybe how you approach things?

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L: Yes, absolutely. I mean, you, you will see people who are afraid, let's say, to, to confront their parents and, and then they won't, they won't do that, but then they'll suffer anxiety for years about certain things or, or whatever it may be. So, and you also see, you know, people with their fears, um, they end up sometimes engaging in self-destructive behaviors because of, of their fears. And so, you know, these things can be very dramatic. They can be very significant and certainly negatively, negatively impact people's lives depending on how strong they are. I mean, I dunno how much we'll get into the clinical here today, you know, but for sure these fears are one of the biggest things that, that we have to try to take on in life. And, and can we embrace them? Can we understand them and, and manage them because everybody has them. And that's the other point David made very clearly to me and to our players and our staff is that everybody has fears. Even Navy seals, even though they train under high intensity, high stress environments. They're still scared. It's just that they've learned how to manage that response and they learned how to focus under that fear and actually use it to motivate their behaviors. So, so it's a, it's a very interesting topic and, and certainly we need to relate it to tennis.

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J: So, yeah, absolutely. I mean you'll, the terms, you just used there. How do you manage it? And I guess how do you, again, will get through this journey today of

how we turn to embrace it so that we can turn it into a positive knowing that it is a perfectly natural thing.

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L: But that's why I like to use the word manage, and maybe this is a message for coaches and players, is that we talk about fears, be fearless, don't worry about your fears, those kinds of things that we're not really being real. We're suppressing those things. We're not really being aware of them. And then they start dictating our behavior and we start doing things in a way that is not successful. If you think about a fear of failure, then you start avoiding situations where you might fail. You start pulling the shoot, as I would say, before you ever get into the competition because you want to protect your ego and that fear of failure. So, you know, we have to really think about managing those things because we all have them and they're very powerful. But at the same time, you can certainly minimize the impact that they have on you. So if you have a fear of failure in tennis and you know, fear of losing a lead for example, because you feel like once you have lead, you should never lose that lead, which is also irrational. Um, then, you know, if you don't become aware of that, and if you don't, if you don't challenge that kind of thinking, then you are going to struggle. You're gonna experience a lot of anxiety. You might blame it on other things. You blame it on your second serve. You might blame it on your ground strokes, when in reality, it's coming from somewhere else. The real origin is your fear of failure, your fear of maybe success, which is a little bit different too.

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J: Yeah, absolutely and, you know, and as a seal, I mean, in tennis it's not life and death. However, there are some very real pressures that that tennis players go through on not only a human level but actually obviously within matches within, sometimes within practices, you know there's some very real pressures they go through and that certainly can, I guess, make them feel more deeply connected to those fears cause a high pressure environment does tend to draw her out. Maybe some of those what if's, and it dives them back to their fears that, some of the underlying things that are going on and you know, I guess it'd be great to, we'll go through some tennis, certain situations as we as we go.

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L: I think one of the things, I'm sorry to interrupt there Johnny, but what we want the listeners to understand is that when you embark on this journey of high performance, of being great at something, you have, whether you're aware of it or not, you have essentially signed an agreement that I am going to have to deal with my fears either ineffectively or effectively, because when you say, okay, I want to be one of the world's best tennis players, you are now opening yourself up to, I have to play in front of people. I have to play in front of coaches, I have to be in the media spotlight. Um, a lot of people are gonna judge me. My wins, my losses, my, my strengths, my weaknesses, everything is now in the public eye. And there's a lot of people who live life somewhat sheltered because they don't want to have to face those kinds of fears that they might have, you know, failing in front of others and maybe being, feeling like they're a disappointment or letting people down. So again, people, I'm, I want to make this very, very, very clear to everyone that these fears, they set up your whole

life. And if you're not embracing them, if you're not aware of them, you could be living a life that you don't want to have. So it's that important.

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J: Yeah. Well, well, so let, let's talk about the origin of fear. Like, let's, let's get back to where it all starts and let's talk about some of the, the, the beginnings of it. And then let's also talk about some of the physiological effects. Cause I think the, the way it reacts on our body from a physiological perspective could then also have more of an impact on our mind. But then we're ultimately can use our minds, as you say, to then go through this journey of how we then manage it to then be able to deal with it better physiologically and, and so. So tell me about some of the origins of fear.

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L: Sure. I think what I've found very successful for myself or with the athletes I work with or the coaches, is to understand where it comes from. Our fears often live in the future. It's the uncertainty. It's, it's not knowing what's going to happen to me. I don't know today if I'm going to win this match, I don't know if I can perform on this drill. I don't know what people are thinking about me right now. What are they going to say about me after this match? Uh, the what ifs, right? What if I don't make it? What if I'm not good enough? So often our fears live in the future and are based on the what ifs and, and this uncertainty that, well, life is uncertain, right? You don't know what's gonna happen from moment to moment. And so there's fear, fears inherent to life, fear is inherent to tennis because there's a lot of uncertainties, a lot of things we don't control. And control becomes a very important topic when you talk about fears. What do I control? If I know I control it, then I don't have to fear it. If I don't have control, that can be quite scary. So one of the ones I talk about with players, which they find very, I think a very important discussion is fear of flying. A lot of players are afraid, just like anyone, anybody in the population of flying. And this idea that I'm giving up control to that professional staff that's made sure the plane is ready to go and to those pilots, right? And that air traffic control and both destination, the where I'm leaving in a destination, I'm giving up control. And you know, for me when I became a lot less anxious of flying is when I eventually I was reading Shane Murphy's book and I'm going to, I'm drawing a blank off the top of my head, a hot to think of it. But he talked about if you don't control it, why are you going to concern yourself with it? Because it's gonna work out of your control anyway. So why work yourself up about it? And that was such an important point. A. You know, there is some uncertainty and everything you do, but why am I gonna get myself worked up about it, because if I don't control it, then there's no need for me to get worked up about it. So, but fear comes from uncertainty and that uncertainty then kicks off this sort of system that's going on. A, you know, where you, we, you talk about parasympathetic nervous system, the, the fight or flight that, you know, one when there's a threat, whether it's a real threat or it's an irrational sort of perception of threat, the amygdala then sends out signals, Hey, we got a threat. Then that fight or flight system has kicked in. And I think a lot of people are aware of what happens then. You know, there's adrenaline, there's cortisol that these things are going on in the body. Your heart's pumping blood out to your extremities, your breathing becomes more shallow, you're getting ready to take action, you're

sweating, the hair's going up in the back of your neck. Uh, I'm getting nervous as I say this, right? You know, people are listening to this. But this is a response. And you know, the easiest way that I have for people to think about it is if you're walking, you know, in the city and you come to a dark alley at night and you hear something moving in that dark alley, what's the immediate thing you feel? You feel fear and you feel threat. And your brain is evolutionary designed to pick that up in a instant and direct your behavior. So I mean that's, that's what's going on there. But just to, to kind of circle back, you know, I was watching this great documentary about fear of the dark and this is when I started really diving into this topic. And where did that come from? Well, if you think about it, now the earth is lit up, I mean, you look at it from space, the pictures and it's lit up, right? We have light everywhere. And well, a thousand years ago, 2000 years ago, that wasn't necessarily the case. And so when did most crimes, or at least people thought most crimes happened? In the dark because you didn't, couldn't see it coming, right. A lot of attacks in wars have happened at night cause you can't see it coming. And so that's where a lot of that fear came from, that uncertainty, which creates a lot of anxiety.

[12:18](#)

J: Absolutely. And just to circle back, because it's a very, I think most of the listeners will have heard the term fight or flight. Um, there's also a third one to that, the freeze.

[12:27](#)

L: The freeze, yes.

[12:27](#)

J: You know, so you know, that response, that response of I'm gonna, okay, if I'm get the fight response from, from all the physiological things that go on on the side, I'm going to fight it. That's the part where I'm going to face it, head on, you know, dive into the deep end without fear that, you know, I'm going to sink to the bottom. Like I'm going to go in head first.

[12:46](#)

L: This is the mother who pulls the car off the baby, right? That whole story, right? The immense strength that you gain from these situations, that fight response.

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J: Yeah. Yeah. And then you've got the, the flight, which is essentially kind of you, you shy away from it. You kind of don't want to, you don't want to deal with it. You know it, you know it's there, you know it exists and you basically choose to avoid the situation. And then you've got the freeze, which is completely freezing in the moment. You know that this moment is so overwhelming that that actually doesn't give you a fight or flight response. It just makes you panic in the moment and then just freeze and nothing, nothing happens.

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L: The freeze is interesting because that's been an addition, and I have to look into this more in the literature, but I get a sense that, uh, with the freeze, that's kind of becomes a more of a behavioral, psychological kind of secondary effect that happens when you, you're experiencing stress and when you, you said the appropriate word when it comes to freeze is overwhelmed. When people are

overwhelmed, they tend to freeze. So this becomes more of a, I think it has to do maybe with fear of not being able to be successful or complete all your tasks and missing the deadline, failing out of school, this kind of stuff, right? I think about that often when we talk about being overwhelmed, overwhelmed with life, the daily stressors, you know, parenting, you know, however many children you have and having a job. These kinds of things. These are, to me, these are like 20th century, you know, kinds of, you know, fears in many ways. And this freeze response, what you see is that is an irrational inability to take action. You have, you have this work, whatever needs to be done, right, something needs to be done and I'm unable to do it. And I'm not able to function. So that's unhealthy because of me being stuck with this fear. And what you see happening Johnny, is that the person's ruminating or dwelling on this, the fear and how overwhelming it is and how they feel and the stress and the anxiety just goes up and it goes up and it goes up and it, it causes them to freeze. So I think it's important to sort of clarify that for the listeners because you know, you will see from your players even sometimes they're not moving their feet. Well, you know, that's part of that anxiety fight or flight system is like sometimes we just stop moving when we get under pressure.

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J: So, so, so how much of being in these certain situations, so let's take a life example where let's say a dark alley and you've got to walk down a dark alley to get from wherever you go into wherever you want to get. And that fight or flight kicks in, that fear comes in, what, what might happen down this dark alley. Okay. If we talk about tennis, right, as you, as you get further into a championship and you get a grand slam, especially that say you get in , you get through first, second, third round, fourth round, quarterfinals and onwards that the, it seems like the closer you get to that goal, the more fear kind of kicks in, the more the spotlight's on you. Cause now maybe you've played a lot of your matches on the outside courts and now all of a sudden you're thrusting onto center court or you know, or Arthur Ashe stadium or you know, the, the big centers. And so some of that fear kicks in. How much of the, how much of repetition comes into releasing some of that fear? Meaning, you know, we know, again, I'm not the doctor, you are, but you know that the more times you put yourself through a situation or, or your belly, basically building patterns that your brain recognizes and remembers. And so, you know, the more that I'm storing in my brain of going through those certain situations, the more comfortable I start to feel, especially if nothing sort of, I guess bad or perceived as bad in the brain comes out of it. So how much of the situation and repetition of that situation comes into releasing some of the fear?

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L: Well, I think we're, we're talking about like desensitization. So when you see something or you experienced something multiple times, it begins to lose its impact on you. And in terms of, uh, tennis, when you start playing a number of weeks in a row and you're playing matches, you start to become a bit desensitized to some of the big moments in a match, players talk about that often, you know, so that is, that is a part of it, of it, excuse me, that when you're playing in those situations, you're playing in the big stadiums, you're in the second week of slams, often then you begin to be more comfortable or

desensitized to those situations. For the juniors, you know, playing in finals, uh, even at the start playing in front of your family, you know, at first it's very nerve wracking. Then you become desensitized at some point. That doesn't mean that the nerves don't pop back up. It just means that you're a little bit more comfortable, uh, with what's going to happen. There's less uncertainty. Now what I would say is what you see too, uh, very important for the listeners is that when you, let's say you take a four week break from tennis and you go back to start playing again, they talk about match toughness. A big part of this is that desensitization and exposure that you had to those stressful environments, to those stressful experiences has worn off. And so now that's why you see often, not always, but a player who's had three or four weeks off and they played their first match and they're really anxious because they haven't been in that environment for a while and three or four weeks for a tennis player is a long time, you know, and not that they, going back to other podcasts on how we prepare to be our best. They should be taking those blocks, but the same time we need to be educating the players on what's coming instead of, God I hope she doesn't play nervous today, hey, the nerves are coming. Talk about it in week two, week three of the training block. The nerves, you're going to be nervous. That's fine. There's a good chance you will be. That's normal. Pro players feel nervous when they play a first round of a slam. You know, they feel a lot of nerves a lot of different times. So instead of shying away from those fears, talking about them in the training and saying, look, what actually helps you to embrace your fears, knowing that you're prepared, that you have a plan, plans create certainty. And that's the opposite of that fear response. If I know what's going to happen and I put my focus on what's most important and that is the process of how I'm going to do things and that's my definition of success, then I can rule out the uncertainty, allow the fear out. Not completely, but, um, definitely a lot of it and I can begin to embrace those situations a little bit more, normalize them in my mind. Yeah, I'm going to be nervous so I'm ready to deal with that though. I'm prepared. So, you know, I think that, uh, the players benefit a lot. The more that we as coaches and parents talk about it as a normal experience and if you have a plan for it, then you're going to be okay. You won't be perfect and that's fine too, but you'll be okay.

[19:01](#)

J: Yeah. Well, talk me through some of the management techniques or strategies that you use. I mean, are they, you know, there's certain stages to, to how you deal with fear or is it just a process over time that, you know, can, can kind of, you know, kind of be like a game of chutes and ladders. It can go in one direction, then it come back and, and you, you're navigating, you know, or is it more simpler than that?

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L: No, I think, I think it is a little bit like shoots and ladders. That's a good example where you'll, you'll have times where you manage it well and they'll be other times when you don't, so you'll, you'll think, okay, this player that I'm working with is ready to take on this fear inducing experience playing in a big match in a big stadium. And then they struggle. And it could be a new variable entered into the equation that you know, that something was going on with their game. They didn't feel good about their serve that day. Or they realize that

everybody that was ever a part of their tennis growing up is now in their box and it's just overwhelming, right? So these things happen. So you're aware that it's, it's kind of a back and forth process is not a linear developmental process unfortunately. But at the same time, there is a, what I would say a way of going about things that you need to work so that you can start embracing your fears. And I think the first thing, and this is again, you know David Rutherford is one of the first things that he brought to our attention is, now how do you, are you really aware of your fears and have you named them? Have you labeled them and have you listed them? And then have you shared them with someone? Because until you do that, they're just living in your, in your mind and your body and you're not really addressing, uh, what's there.

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J: So write out a list of things that you're scared of.

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L: Yeah, that's in, in...He asked our group and they're, you know, there's about probably 50 people in the room and maybe one or two it had had done that. And so that just goes to show that this is, these are not the kinds of things that we want to...

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J: Think about.

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L: ...Think about or write down. You know, it's a bit scary. There you go. Right? So, but when you start to get these out, it's amazing, because we did that with a lot of our players in, in some of the conversations that came out of that were just unbelievable. Some things that we had never gotten to. Yeah, I'm afraid of this and, and it started with I'm afraid of spiders. And then we'd say, okay, well how many people last year died because of spider bites? And David said it was like five, and four were in Australia. So our Australian coaches have reason to be nervous, but otherwise, you know, it's a bit irrational, right? To be afraid of spiders and understanding that they're more afraid of you than you are of them. Uh, you're a lot bigger. So, but nonetheless, again, this behavior drives things, you know, that, that fear, uh, the reactions that we see. So, you know, you could see the players really starting to engage, write them down. And they actually start, I want to say enjoy is not the right word, but they definitely, uh, were very engaged with the conversation and we gotten some very good, uh, discussions about those things.

[21:42](#)

J: While I'm guessing too that by, I think maybe I've done this exercise once, you know, by sharing your fears with another person, it actually creates more comfort in your thinking because you often, it's often the case that a lot of people have very similar fears to you. So now you're almost creating this comfortability and that this is, this is normal, there's this community where yeah, we have the same fears and that's okay and, and you know, almost like how, how can we help deal with this together? And, and I guess something from a tennis standpoint, that's why it's nice having a team around you, cause I guess the, you know, you've got trusted people that you can share those fears with. They may have very similar fears to you. I mean obviously coaches, parents, whatever, and then you're a player, but you might all have very similar fears.

But, but being able to talk through those, I think helps release maybe some of that pressure that you're feeling.

[22:36](#)

L: Absolutely. And we've seen that in our work. But why does group therapy work? Right? Because, and a big reason is because that you share and you begin to realize that a lot of people have these kind of spheres. It becomes normal. And when normalizing is one of the most powerful techniques we have to move on from our fears or to move on from our distractions, the, Hey, that's, it's normal to feel this way when you walk into a stadium of 10,000 people or to feel this way when you walk into a final and everyone from your family is there, it's normal to be nervous, to be scared, but that doesn't have to dictate your behavior that day. So, you know, to me, that normalizing effect is very important to communicate and to understand. You know, and the other thing we've seen Johnny is that when our players share what they're afraid of or, or that they're nervous, it's important not to be like, okay, yeah, you're nervous, it's fine, it's fine, it's fine, but okay, well tell me, you know, do you understand what the source of that is? And again, if you're a pre-match, you can't go too deep because well that can really be distracting to the performance. But if you are four or five days out from the match, you're having this conversation and a lot of players get nervous early, then you can get into that discussion with what really is causing those nerves. Ah, you know, my whole family is going to show up at this tournament and uh, I don't want to let them down. Okay, that is completely normal feeling. Now maybe I'd have you look at this differently. They're there to support you. They just want the best for you. They want you to enjoy this competition. And the, they're just there to provide emotional support no matter what happens and trying to help them then normalize it and begin to look at it in a different way.

[24:05](#)

J: So they essentially stop avoiding it, which yeah, I'm guessing over time, you know, gets rid of that anxiety, the anxiety that maybe leads to a little, little depression, some destructive thoughts. So, you know, the other thing, so basically was stop making mountains out of molehills, right? Stop catas... You know.

[24:22](#)

L: Catastrophizing, JP.

[24:24](#)

J: Catastrophizing.

[24:25](#)

L: It's a big psych word. Yeah. I think as you, as you're getting into how do you begin to, you know, really challenge these fears, change them. I think there's four ways, and I talked to our team about this, in the preseason number one is knowing what's real, check reality. Is this thought that I'm having a real thought? Is that based in reality based on fact, if it's not, then I realize I'm being irrational and I can then challenge that thought based on reality that, you know what? I haven't gone out there and choked in front of 10,000 people. There's no, no reason to create this story right now. Um, that, that fear, while it's there, the future, the, what if, the uncertainty, it hasn't happened to me, but let's say the fear is real. There's a real perceived threat that if I don't do well, you know, I

might run out of money to be on the tour. Right? OK, well I can't sit there as a, a mental coach and say, well, you know, don't worry about that. That's, you know, no big deal. It is a big deal. So then you have to at least be real and be aware like, okay, I got you, that's real and not, that would also cause a lot of people, including myself, some stress. Now how do we deal with this? And it gets you to the second part and that is are we catastrophizing things? Are we making mountains out of mole hills? Are we saying, you know, this is life and death that if I lose I'm the worst player ever, if I lose y'all never make it. I'll never win a final ever again. I'll never win another match. I can't play. I don't know how to play in front of an audience. I don't know how to play a match in a tournament or all this stuff, these negative, stinky, fearful thoughts that we have. Um, when you start to say, look, I'm making this too big, I just lost a single match. I'm not a total loser. It doesn't mean I'm always going to lose in this situation. It's a match. And the more we begin to become aware of how we catastrophize, and, and awfulize the consequences of what happens to us, we can begin to challenge those odds and say, you know what, I'm not an awful tennis player and in fact, I'm a good tennis player. I'm just making too big of a deal out of this break of serve right here or this shot that I missed or how I'm unable to, to handle this, uh, in this situation. So.

[26:26](#)

J: Yeah. Yeah. So give me, give me something that I can do tomorrow if I step on court and I am having a lot of these fears, tell me something that I can do to help prepare, deal with them.

[26:36](#)

L: Well, I think the first thing is you have to go to your breathing. And we know that as this fear response is happening a lot, a lot of the logical thinking you want to have that start, that comes from the cerebral cortex is shutting down because you just need to take action without thought. That's what's happening to your body and your brain when you're under a threat. So the ability to breathe allows us to get back to some form of balance and allows us to begin to think a little more clearly again, to become present and to become more aware so we can make a good decision. So in those situations, um, even if there is a real threat or there's not, it's just a perceived threat and you know, I'm losing in a match, let's say, to go to your breathing and being very mindful now players be like, okay, I'm going to breathe during my matches. Great. But you have to, you have to practice that. You don't just open that skill up, you know, in an ITF final and say, okay, it's gonna work for me. It's something that you do all the time. You do it in practice, you practice mindful breathing at home. You learn how to focus your mind. Even when you're distracted and you're able to accept what is and how you feel out, you're able to normalize. You're able to decatastrophize. You're able to be real with yourself. Okay. Understand what you control, stay present, and then begin to make the kind of choice that you want to make to be president again and commit to whatever it is that you're doing. You know that purpose in that moment. So to me, it meant mindful breathing and practicing is very important.

[27:58](#)

J: Now this, this has been also like diving into, this is such a pertinent topic that comes up every day, every day, whether you're on the court, outside the court,

it's what, you know, it's what we go through every day. So as we summarize here, take us through the steps of, of managing, managing the fear, the embracing fear part, summarize how we can be, be better about going about it.

[28:18](#)

L: Sure. I think first is to be aware, right? As we talked about, be aware of the fears that are there. Share them with someone that you trust, not just with a random person, but someone you know will keep it confidential, that can actually help you with these things. So first be aware. Secondly, again, know who you're going to share these with because that helps, I would say next then is to begin to accept that these are normal and stop avoiding them. You know, because these things, we all have them. And the more that we bring them to light and we start to create a plan and we start to become present again, we can actually deal with them quite well. We can begin to live the life that we want. Challenge your fears instead of letting them work and unintentionally drive your behavior in tennis. So I'm afraid of losing a lead. So therefore, when I go to close out, I play really passive. I don't want to make mistakes and I don't play the same game that got me the lead. Uh, be aware of that. Talk with it about a mental coach. Talk with the, with the, um, with your coach, get a plan for those situations. A plan is going to make you feel more comfortable and accept what's happening and begin to challenge those thoughts. Check reality decatastrophize, stay present, okay? And know what you can control. Your breathing, how you're gonna respond to the next thing. Be mindful, practice your mindful breathing, uh, and finally face your fears. You know, it was, if that's important enough, it's worth facing. And so in tennis for example, they're all important enough because there's a lot of fear. In tennis, there's a lot of anxiety and if you want to be your best, you have to face those things head on. So you need to go play matches and put yourself in those situations. You need to train under stress. You need to expose yourself to the situations that scare you because in the end, there's no real harmful consequences for being in that situation.

[30:01](#)

J: Absolutely. I think that's great stuff. And you know, as a, you know, having played tennis both as an individual but on a team there's very, some very real pressures, similar pressures but also different pressures. And then obviously as we look to, to type of, you know, players, people that we help now from the pros to the juniors that you're experiencing a lot of these different, different fears along the way. And so I think it's all going to be a forever learned skill of how we approach different people cause people have slightly different fears and our approach towards them has to be smart. It has to, we have to be patient because sometimes they might not be ready to talk about it and the patience to be, you know, to have the patience until they're ready to talk through things is, you know, has to be key as well I think. So that we don't force the issue and maybe make things worse. So...

[30:50](#)

L: Timing is everything Johnny. So you're working with a player in the first couple of weeks. You're not, tell me all your fears, you know, it's how you do it too. And I would say if a coach is, or a parent is going to do this, that probably want to, uh, at least seek the advice of a mental coach or a therapist or

someone to help them through that. But in the end, what we want for our children, for our players, for ourselves is to live life based on our mission, our goals, our values, our expectations, what we're trying to achieve versus the fears that we have in letting it really take us in a different direction.

[31:21](#)

J: That's awesome. Dr Larry, I felt like I've had a very productive therapy session.

[31:26](#)

L: I'm glad we didn't even talk about your fears today. Do you want to throw it out there?

[31:29](#)

J: Let's save that for another time. Let's save that for another time. Well, that's been great. Awesome stuff as always. And uh, you know, thank you for, uh, helping me understand that. But also, you know, going into it for the listeners and any players, coaches, listening, and hopefully found it very beneficial, uh, and helps you with your approach. So that wraps it up for today's episode of compete like a champion podcast that was embracing fears. For more information on this topic in particular, we're going to have, have information on our, on our website, playerdevelopment.usta.com you'll be able to browse through our mental skills section and the sports psychology section and find more topics and information relating to embracing your fears. Until next time with Dr. Larry and coach Johnny, we're checking out.