

Article

Practical Problems and Optimization Pathways in Psychological Skills Training for Tennis Players

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Abstract: Tennis players must continually interpret match information, select actions, and adjust on court, so psychological states become part of technical and tactical execution rather than an optional addition to training. Drawing on the applied orientation of sport psychology and research on psychological skills training, this paper examines how such training currently operates in tennis, with particular attention to repeated point-to-point transitions, uncertain match duration, pressure on critical points, and frequent independent decision-making. The main difficulty is not a complete absence of psychological training. Its position in the overall training plan is often marginal, content is fragmented, links with tennis-specific pressure situations and individual states remain weak, and evaluation, feedback, and professional support are limited. To address these challenges, the paper develops improvement pathways involving integration into daily practice, staged content design, pressure-scenario simulation, individualized adjustment, state monitoring, professional collaboration, and periodic review. The central argument is that stable training effects depend less on intensive use of any single psychological technique than on whether goal setting, attentional control, emotional management, confidence maintenance, and pressure adaptation are repeatedly practiced alongside sport-specific tasks and recalibrated through ongoing evaluation and feedback. By systematically embedding psychological skills within routine tennis practice and aligning them with the unique demands of competitive play, coaches and sport psychologists can foster more resilient and adaptable athletes. This integrated approach ultimately enhances performance consistency and supports the long-term psychological development of tennis players at all competitive levels.

Keywords: tennis; psychological skills training; sport psychology; attentional control; performance optimization

1. Introduction

Technique, physical conditioning, and tactics do not operate as separate systems in a tennis match. Between points, players must reassess the score, changes in the opponent's play, and their own condition, then redirect attention and select the next action. Sport psychology addresses psychological activity within precisely this kind of situated performance. It has been described as both a foundational and applied field that emerged from the development of psychological and sport sciences in response to the demands of athletic competition [2]. Reviews of international discussions on the subject indicate that psychological preparation, competitive motivation, personality, motor learning, and competition-related psychological processes had already become major areas of focus. For tennis, the implication is practical: psychological factors are not merely pre-match state variables; they are trainable elements embedded in shot selection, rhythm management, and recovery after a lost point.

The development of sport psychology in China has also been strongly practice-oriented. Applied work has long included psychological profiling of elite athletes, psychological selection of young athletes, psychological training and consultation during training and competition, and coach education [3]. Later contributions placed personality,

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arousal levels, emotional responses, psychological skills training, and sport motivation among the major domains of modern sport psychology, while emphasizing theoretical guidance, ecological validity, and the explanation and modulation of sport behavior. Seen from this perspective, psychological skills training should not be reduced to pre-match relaxation or motivational encouragement. Attention, emotion, and self-control need to become capacities that can be rehearsed within tennis practice and retrieved under competitive pressure.[4].

Tennis places especially strong contextual demands on psychological skills. The score changes point by point, requiring players to disengage quickly from the previous outcome and prepare for the next exchange. Match duration and competitive rhythm are uncertain, while critical points, repeated errors, a shrinking lead, or a deficit create different forms of pressure. In singles, the player must make most judgments and adjustments independently; doubles adds communication and coordination with a partner [5]. These features make general exhortations about willpower or pre-match readiness insufficient. Psychological work has to enter more specific processes, including attentional shifting, goal setting, emotional recovery, confidence maintenance, pressure management, and pacing of match rhythm.

Existing research offers a substantial theoretical and methodological base for psychological skills training, yet its use in tennis still requires interpretation through the structure of the sport itself. It has been argued that sport psychology research should combine theoretical orientation with both national-cultural and sport-cultural contexts, moving beyond structural description toward functional inquiry [6]. Similarly, caution has been raised against simple transplantation and a call made for research that responds more directly to domestic sport practice. The present paper follows that line of reasoning. Its concern is not whether psychological techniques exist, but whether they can be incorporated into everyday tennis practice, critical-point management, and between-point recovery. The discussion first clarifies the relevant theoretical foundations and research progress, then examines limitations in training organization, sport-specific situations, individual differences, and evaluation support before developing corresponding optimization pathways (As shown in Figure 1).

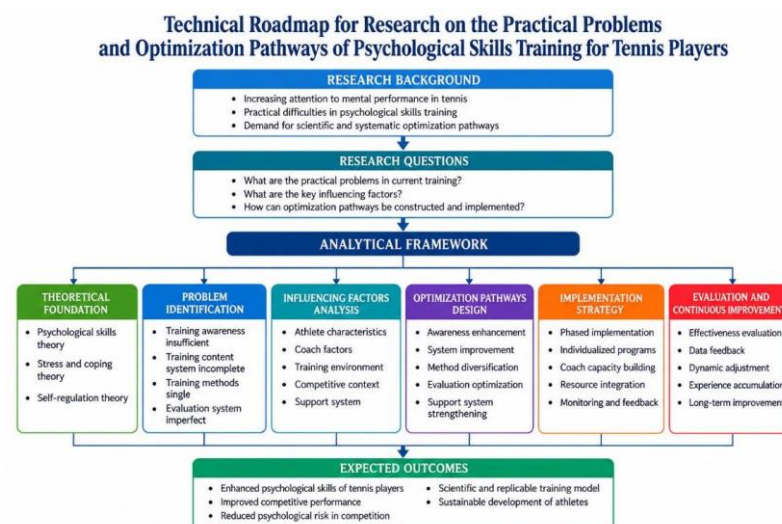


Figure 1. Technical Roadmap for Psychological Skills Training Optimization in Tennis

2. Theoretical Foundations and Research Progress

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Psychological Skills Training

2.1.1. Applied Orientation of Sport Psychology

Sport psychology examines how psychological processes influence concrete sport behavior. Research has broadened from motor learning, movement execution, and

competition-related factors to encompass personality, motivation, and emotional control, physiological arousal, and psychological training. Over time, emphasis has shifted from describing athletes' psychological characteristics toward understanding how such states affect training and competitive performance [7]. For this paper, the applied orientation serves less as a textbook definition and more as a foundational premise: a psychological skill holds training value only when directly aligned with the specific demands of the sport. Consequently, effectiveness is evaluated by whether an athlete can maintain sufficient control over attention, emotional responses, and behavior amid fluctuating scores, repeated point gains and losses, and training-related pressure—not merely by whether a given technique has been introduced.

2.1.2. Components of Psychological Skills Training

Psychological skills training in this paper refers to repeated practice directed at competitive tasks so that athletes acquire self-regulatory abilities they can deliberately apply in training and competition [8]. The aim is not to identify one fixed 'optimal psychological state.' More important is the ability to notice a shift in internal state, select an appropriate response, and re-engage with the current task. Prior research situated personality, physiological activation, cognitive appraisal, psychological skills training, and sport motivation within the same conceptual framework, highlighting the interaction of multiple factors in competitive psychology. In tennis, the present analysis concentrates on goal setting, attentional control, self-talk, emotional management, confidence building, imagery, relaxation and activation modulation, and adaptation to pressure because each can be tied directly to between-point adjustment, pre-serve routines, and execution on critical points.

These abilities do not need to be trained simultaneously in every session. Goal setting helps redirect attention from match outcome to the task that can be executed now. Attentional control concerns shot-related cues, tactical assignments, and transitions between rallies. Self-talk and emotional management become particularly relevant after repeated errors or during high-pressure points [9]. Confidence, meanwhile, is more effective when grounded in preparation, sport-specific competence, and controllable behavior than in general encouragement. Imagery, relaxation, and activation modulation can support recovery under varying pressure conditions. Psychological skills are treated here as a set of combinable training resources; their priority should vary with the session objective and the athlete's current state.

2.1.3. Individual Differences and Contextual Adaptation

Individual differences mean that the same psychological method will not produce uniform effects across athletes. Personality research is widely regarded as essential for advancing the theoretical foundations of sport psychology and enhancing its practical application in athletic training. In tennis, such differences manifest in highly observable ways: one player may exhibit a markedly constricted attentional focus during critical points; another may engage in negative self-appraisal following several consecutive errors; a third may become overly focused on the outcome when ahead, thereby rhythm an established performance rhythm. Individual difference is therefore integrated as a key factor guiding the customization of training plans, rather than treated as an optional supplement to the program. A common conceptual framework remains applicable, but its implementation must be calibrated according to each athlete's psychological profile, competitive level, match experience, and the specific objectives of the current training phase [10].

Contextual adaptation further clarifies the situational conditions under which psychological techniques are likely to be effective [5]. Research topics should align closely with both cultural norms and the distinctive demands of the sport. In the tennis context considered here, this requires moving beyond generic statements about 'sport-specificity.' Psychological strategies need to be explicitly linked to service games, return situations, games, break points, tiebreaks, long rallies, and scenarios involving leading or trailing. Repeated practice of a given technique within simulated tasks that incorporate

comparable pressure cues enables the gradual transformation of procedural knowledge into reliable, competition-ready behavior [11].

2.2. Development of Research Methods and Training Evaluation in Sport Psychology

The effectiveness of psychological skills training cannot be judged solely from athletes' subjective impressions after a session. Scientific methodology in sport psychology has long emphasized integrating psychological approaches with methodologies from systems science, computer science, and related disciplines—always maintaining close alignment with actual sport practice. This methodological principle is especially critical for training evaluation. Psychological states must be interpreted in conjunction with observable behavior, task execution, and the immediate competitive context [2]. Without such contextual integration, it is difficult to distinguish whether a performance fluctuation stems from challenges in psychological adaptation or arises from technical, physical, or tactical factors.

Advances in technology have enabled more direct observation of certain psychological processes under conditions approximating real performance. For instance, eye-movement analysis has been applied to examine cognitive engagement during competition and to differentiate patterns between expert and novice performers [12]. This discussion does not advocate routine reliance on sophisticated instrumentation in tennis training. Rather, the key methodological insight is that evaluation should prioritize process-oriented observation over outcome-only assessment. Attentional stability, for example, may be assessed through consistency in pre-serve routines, selective focus on shot-relevant cues, and decision-making under pressure. Recovery following a lost point can be evaluated via time to recompose, quality of the first shot in the subsequent point, and self-reported readiness. When such process data are integrated with coaching logs, evaluation becomes significantly more grounded in the authentic dynamics of training than post-match impressions alone.

2.3. Applied Sport Psychology Services and Professional Support

The quality of psychological skills training also depends on who organizes it, interprets athletes' responses, and adjusts the program. In discussions of training and supervision for applied sport psychology practitioners, it has been emphasized that professional personnel require specialized knowledge to make sound judgments under conditions of uncertainty. In tennis, this helps clarify the boundary between routine coaching and professional psychological services. Coaches are well placed to organize regular psychological skills exercises and observe sport-specific behavior [13]. When a problem persists, becomes complex, or requires systematic assessment, however, experience-based encouragement alone is insufficient, and personnel with formal training in sport psychology should be involved.

Recent scholarship on collaborative training in applied psychology has proposed enhancing the development of interdisciplinary and practice-oriented professionals through curriculum design, practical teaching, and integrated evaluation. For the present paper, the key point is that effective sport psychology support requires fluency in both psychological methods and the language of athletic training [5, 6]. A psychology professional unfamiliar with tennis scoring systems, training load management, or technical-tactical demands may find it challenging to integrate support strategies into daily practice. Conversely, coaches without foundational knowledge of psychological skills training may find it difficult to distinguish issues resolvable within standard training from those requiring specialized assistance. Stable psychological skills training is therefore more likely to emerge from sustained collaboration than from occasional lectures or short-term preparatory support before competition [7].

3. Review of the Literature

Taken together, the selected literature reflects a progression in sport psychology—from descriptive accounts of sport behavior toward explanatory models of psychological

mechanisms, structured skill development, process-oriented observation, professional support delivery, and personnel capacity building [3]. These studies clarify why psychological skills require systematic development, which capacities are amenable to enhancement, and how developmental progress can be systematically observed. Most, however, remain at a general sport-psychology level. Tennis introduces a more operationally grounded set of questions within the training system itself: when psychological development should be integrated into weekly and phase-based planning, how it can be aligned with training load, competitive pressure, and between-point routines, and how evaluation outcomes can inform subsequent training cycles. Those questions constitute the analytical entry point for what follows.

For that reason, the discussion after this section does not extend the literature review. Instead, it treats the operation of tennis training as the primary object of analysis. The practical assessment focuses on whether psychological development is embedded routinely, whether learning follows a coherent progression, whether training scenarios encompass critical moments and fluctuations in psychological state, whether individual learner differences are acknowledged and accommodated, and whether documentation and feedback mechanisms are robust enough to guide iterative refinement [8]. The optimization section, in turn, does not aim to expand the repertoire of available methods; rather, it examines how identified operational limitations can be addressed within the training process itself.

4. Practical Problems in Psychological Skills Training for Tennis Players

4.1. Psychological Skills Training Remains Marginal in the Overall Training Plan

Daily tennis practice must accommodate physical conditioning, technique, tactics, match play, and recovery, all within limited training time [6]. Psychological skills development is consequently often deprioritized: coaches typically rely on verbal guidance during routine practice and focus on confidence, relaxation, or emotional stability only as major competitions approach. Such guidance may enhance short-term awareness, but it seldom cultivates robust, automatic responses under competitive pressure. Like a serve or a movement pattern, effective mental strategies require consistent, deliberate practice. When such practice occurs infrequently, athletes tend to rely on ad hoc coping during matches.

A related challenge is the insufficient integration of psychological development with sport-specific tasks. Some training frameworks treat technical-tactical work as 'how to play' and mental development as a separate 'how to think' domain, with minimal alignment in session planning or post-match analysis [13]. A player may recognize the need to adjust after an error or understand the importance of focused attention on critical points, yet lack concrete, actionable procedures—such as a prescribed breathing rhythm following a lost point, specific perceptual cues before serving, or a structured method to reestablish immediate objectives after repeated setbacks. Thus, the peripheral status of mental training reflects not only scheduling limitations but also fundamental limitations in pedagogical design.

4.2. Training Content Is Fragmented and Lacks Progression

Encouragement, self-suggestion, relaxation, goal-based motivation, and simulated competition are commonly employed in current practice. The challenge lies in the fact that these methods are often selected reactively, in response to immediate concerns.

Confidence is prioritized when an athlete experiences diminished belief, relaxation techniques are applied when stress rises before competition, and attention control is emphasized when focus wanes. Because these measures are not structured around a coherent learning sequence or long-term developmental goals, training tends to function as a series of isolated corrective steps rather than a systematic process for cultivating sustainable self-regulatory capacity.

Psychological skills follow a developmental progression and require staged transfer into increasingly demanding contexts. Initial training should support athletes in

identifying characteristic stress responses and patterns of attentional shift. Once foundational regulatory strategies are internalized, they can be progressively integrated into match-like conditions, including scoring pressure and physical fatigue. As competition approaches, emphasis shifts toward consolidating consistent personal routines—such as pre-match preparation, inter-point adjustment, and recovery between games. Bypassing these developmental layers may result in athletes attempting unfamiliar techniques under high-pressure conditions or remaining indefinitely in low-stakes practice without achieving functional skill transfer to competitive settings.

4.3. Psychological Training Is Insufficiently Integrated with Tennis-Specific Competitive Situations

Psychological pressure in tennis fluctuates dynamically throughout a match. Critical moments—such as break points, set-clinching games, tiebreaks, consecutive double faults, recovery periods following extended rallies, diminishing leads, and deciding sets—significantly influence attentional focus and risk assessment. When psychological training is conducted predominantly in low-stimulus environments and fails to replicate these sport-specific competitive contexts, the effectiveness of such practices may be compromised under actual match conditions.

Singles and doubles tennis place distinct psychological demands on athletes. In singles, players independently regulate emotional recovery, tactical decision-making, and match tempo. Doubles introduce additional layers, including real-time partner communication, adaptive responses to teammates' errors, and coordinated tactical execution. Applying a uniform psychological training framework across both formats undermines contextual specificity. The challenge lies not in the scarcity of available techniques, but in the misalignment between existing methods and the structural realities of tennis competition.

4.4. Individual Differences and Dynamic States Are Not Adequately Identified

Psychological load from identical training tasks varies significantly across individuals. Athletes with less experience may be more susceptible to external factors such as audience presence, officiating decisions, or an opponent's competitive standing [13]. Even highly experienced athletes can experience heightened pressure in novel contexts—such as facing a specific rival, competing at a high-stakes event, or returning from injury. Moreover, an individual's psychological state is inherently dynamic and influenced by variables including daily training volume, sleep quality, recent performance outcomes, and physical well-being. Consequently, standardized psychological practices cannot fully address this degree of inter- and intra-individual variability.

Using match results alone to detect psychological difficulties risks conflating psychological fluctuations with technical shortcomings or physiological decline. A sequence of errors may arise from diminished attentional control, yet it may equally reflect biomechanical inefficiency, suboptimal tactical execution, or fatigue-induced degradation in motor precision. In the absence of systematic state monitoring and differential diagnosis among potential contributing factors, psychological explanations risk becoming default attributions for underperformance. This undermines evidence-informed training adjustments and may inadvertently impose unwarranted psychological strain on the athlete.

4.5. Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms Are Weak

The effects of psychological skills training are often process-oriented and may not manifest directly in match outcomes. A player may lose a match while demonstrating improved handling of critical points, quicker recovery following errors, and enhanced emotional stability [3].

Another player may win while still relying heavily on the opponent's mistakes during high-pressure moments, with minimal observable progress in self-management

capabilities [13]. When evaluation relies solely on results or subjective coach impressions, these subtle yet meaningful improvements remain difficult to identify.

Training records often capture static states without reflecting dynamic processes. Notes such as 'average today' or 'somewhat nervous in the match' omit key contextual details—such as triggering circumstances, specific behavioral responses, applied strategies, and subsequent recovery patterns [13]. Such documentation offers limited utility for retrospective analysis. In the absence of robust evaluation frameworks, training planning remains largely experiential; coaches lack objective evidence to determine optimal methods for individual athletes or to refine subsequent training cycles.

4.6. Coaches' Psychological Training Competence and Professional Support Are Insufficient

Coaches possess the most direct understanding of athletes' sport-specific performance and serve as primary facilitators of daily psychological skills development; however, their professional training typically emphasizes technical, tactical, and physical conditioning. In the absence of systematic expertise in sport psychology, psychological support often remains informal—limited to pre-competition briefings, corrective feedback, or generalized motivational statements—lacking structured evaluation or individualized support planning. The distinction in professional responsibilities becomes particularly critical when athletes exhibit sustained emotional distress, altered sleep patterns, low mood, or consistent reluctance to compete. Addressing such conditions solely through coaching experience may extend beyond the scope of coaching practice.

Collaboration between sport psychology professionals and coaching staff can also be hindered by disciplinary disconnects [10]. For instance, a psychologist unfamiliar with sport-specific terminology or competitive timing may suggest strategies that prove difficult to integrate into routine training. Similarly, if coaches engage psychological specialists only reactively—after observable difficulties arise—sustained integration remains challenging. Without established, ongoing coordination mechanisms, psychological skills development risks falling between the responsibilities of daily coaching and specialized psychological service.

5. Optimization Pathways for Psychological Skills Training for Tennis Players

5.1. Integrate Psychological Skills into Sport-Specific Training Plans

Moving psychological work away from the margins begins by embedding psychological tasks directly into tennis practice plans rather than assigning them to isolated, infrequent sessions. Psychological skills do not require extended, standalone training periods. They can be incorporated into weekly and phase-based objectives: serve practice may include a consistent pre-serve attentional routine; match play may incorporate a structured recovery response after a lost point; and the concluding segment of physical conditioning may require athletes to sustain tactical focus while fatigued. Psychological work thus becomes an integral condition under which technical execution is developed, enabling coaches to monitor its progression within standard training records.

Training design should clearly differentiate between acquiring a psychological technique and applying it under competitive conditions. Techniques such as controlled breathing, self-instruction, mental imagery, and attentional redirection are first practiced in low-demand settings to ensure athletes understand their purpose and timing. Gradually, elements such as score-related stakes, time limitations, opponent-induced stress, and physical exhaustion are introduced. External demands may increase while the psychological routine remains as consistent as possible—this approach allows assessment of whether athletes have progressed from theoretical knowledge to reliable competition application [5, 6].

5.2. Build Staged, Modular Psychological Skills Training Content

Psychological skills training follows a progressive structure, yet each stage need not constitute a self-contained course. Initial efforts may emphasize helping athletes identify

their characteristic reactions to performance stress, shifting competitive positions, and recurring execution errors, while introducing basic self-monitoring practices. A limited set of foundational techniques can then be reinforced through repeated practice before integration into sport-specific competitive scenarios. During pre-competition phases and periods of high competition density, emphasis transitions toward consistency in personal routines—such as pre-match preparation, inter-point adjustment, and recovery between sets [3, 4]. While progression is encouraged, the framework permits revisiting earlier stages when competitive demands reveal skill gaps.

Content may be structured around a compact set of recurrent psychological tasks, each carrying distinct training value. Goal management involves translating broad outcome objectives into immediate, actionable shot or tactical decisions. Attentional control focuses on reorienting focus to task-relevant cues following external interruptions or internal affective shifts. Affective adaptation supports recovery after errors and facilitates stable performance during fluctuations in competitive status. Confidence development relies on verifiable training outcomes, documented successful experiences, and controllable behavioral strategies rather than generalized affirmation. Pressure resilience is assessed by evaluating whether these competencies remain functional under increasing situational demands—including high-stakes moments, physical fatigue, and ambiguous conditions. A single session need not address all domains; prioritizing one clear objective typically yields more actionable feedback.

5.3. Strengthen Simulation of Critical Points and Pressure Situations

The situations most requiring repeated psychological rehearsal are those likely to challenge a player's composure. Training may initiate a service game at 0–30, introduce break-point or set-deciding scenarios, employ tiebreaks or final-set conditions, or require serving again following consecutive double faults. Scoring and task outcomes retain functional significance [2]. The objective is not to induce distress intentionally, but to enable athletes to consistently recognize demanding moments, apply a pre-established routine, execute the tactical requirement, and transition effectively to the next point—while coaches identify where the sequence most frequently falters.

If simulation becomes overly routine, it risks fostering rigid, context-insensitive responses. Coaches can systematically vary scorelines, serving order, opponent profiles, and task specifications, and incorporate court transitions or ambient sound cues when appropriate. In doubles practice, partners may deliberately introduce variability—such as repeated technical errors, fluctuating communication patterns, or mid-point tactical shifts—to prompt rehearsal of verbal coordination, mutual emotional control, and collaborative decision-making [5]. While external conditions shift, the athlete's internal psychological routine serves as the stable anchor; this contrast yields a more rigorous assessment of skill transfer.

5.4. Implement Psychological Skills Programs Based on Individual Differences

Individualization does not require a completely separate system for every athlete. A more practical approach is to identify the primary psychological challenge within a shared framework and determine the priority focus for a defined period. Pre-training assessments—including structured interviews, self-ratings, coaching observations, and video analysis—can identify contexts where attentional control, emotional management, or confidence are most vulnerable to fluctuation. For instance, one athlete may benefit from strategies to counteract negative self-talk following repeated errors; another may require refinement of a consistent pre-serve routine during high-stakes points; a third may need support in sustaining task-focused attention rather than shifting prematurely to outcome evaluation when ahead. Thus, individualization resides in the selection of the priority target, not in superficial variations of delivery format.

Priority targets should evolve in alignment with seasonal progression. Factors such as injury rehabilitation status, competition intensity, recent performance outcomes, and accumulated training load dynamically influence psychological requirements. A four- to

six-week review cycle provides a suitable interval for integrating training logs, match behavior patterns, and athlete feedback to recalibrate emphasis.

Compared to a static, year-round psychological curriculum, an adaptive, rolling adjustment process responds more effectively to evolving mental states and enables coaches to synchronize psychological development with sport-specific physical and tactical demands [12].

5.5. Use Smart-Sport Tools to Improve State Monitoring and Feedback

The primary contribution of digital tools in psychological training lies in enhancing observational accuracy, not substituting professional judgment with technological devices. Wearable technology can capture physiological metrics such as heart rate; video analysis can document variations in pre-serve routines and behavioral responses following lost points; brief self-report scales or structured training logs can record subjective experiences including perceived pressure, attentional focus, and emotional state. When interpreted within the specific training context in which they were collected, such data enable coaches to differentiate transient reactions from persistent patterns.

Increasing the number of measured indicators does not inherently improve monitoring efficacy. Excessive measurement raises logistical burdens and may shift the athlete's attention toward data collection itself rather than performance execution. A more effective strategy is to select a limited set of indicators directly aligned with the current training objective. For instance, when addressing post-error recovery, relevant measures might include time to regain composure, quality of the first action in the subsequent point, and the athlete's self-assessment. When optimizing decision consistency under high-stakes conditions, adherence to a standardized preparatory routine and stability in tactical choices may yield greater insight. Data should inform the next feedback cycle only when they meaningfully clarify the targeted training issue.

5.6. Establish Collaboration among Coaches, Sport Psychology Professionals, and Athletes

A collaborative arrangement first requires clearly defined roles. Coaches are best positioned to integrate psychological strategies into tennis practice and provide immediate, behavior-based feedback. Sport psychology professionals contribute expertise in assessment, design of support strategies, and management of more complex psychological challenges. Athletes assume responsibility for active engagement, self-monitoring, and reporting on the effectiveness of applied strategies. Collaboration should focus on specific training objectives and be sustained over time, rather than initiated solely following performance setbacks or noticeable declines in form.

Continuity also depends on shared understanding of key concepts among participants. Psychological strategies must be translated into observable tennis routines and concrete behavioral expectations, while coaches require sufficient familiarity with psychological skills training to avoid misattributing difficulties to insufficient motivation or effort. Mental health concerns extending beyond performance support should be referred promptly to qualified clinical professionals. When these functional boundaries are clearly established, routine coaching and specialized psychological services can operate synergistically without substituting for one another.

5.7. Improve Evaluation and Continuous Adjustment of Psychological Skills Training

Evaluation must address two core questions: whether the athlete demonstrates observable change within the competitive task, and whether the training method proves reliably applicable across repeated situations. Match outcomes and performance on key moments offer valuable outcome indicators, yet process-level data are equally essential. Informative behavioral markers include adherence to pre-serve routines, speed and quality of recovery following lost points, consistency in tactical decision-making, and deliberate use of attentional cues. Athletes' self-reported experiences further clarify their subjective responses to pressure and their capacity for self-management. Integrating these diverse sources yields a more robust and nuanced assessment of training impact than reliance on any single metric.

At the end of each training cycle, review should avoid simplistic judgments such as 'effective' or 'ineffective.'

More constructive questions focus on whether the initial challenge has diminished, under which specific conditions the method functions successfully, and where it continues to falter. Approaches demonstrating consistent application may be integrated into the athlete's personalized match routine; those proving difficult to implement require refinement [5]. Over successive cycles, athletes can develop an evolving psychological-skills log—documenting recurrent high-pressure scenarios, preferred coping strategies, functional cue words, and pre-match preparation sequences. This log should actively guide subsequent training design rather than serve as a static psychological profile.

6. Conclusion

The central value of psychological skills training for tennis players lies in transforming on-court mental management into a competitive capacity that can be consistently practiced within sport-specific training. Tennis advances through continuous point-by-point gains and losses, concentrates pressure around critical points, and unfolds with uncertain rhythm and duration. Players must repeatedly redirect attention, recover emotionally, make tactical judgments, and manage their internal states. Psychological support that appears only as pre-match guidance or reactive response after difficulties arise is unlikely to support stable execution across long matches and repeated competition.

From the perspective of training operations, the main challenge is not the absence of psychological support, but rather its marginal integration into the overall plan. Methods often lack systematic progression, and training does not align closely enough with high-stakes scoring moments, physical fatigue, or fluctuations in mental state. Individual differences, assessment of outcomes, and interdisciplinary collaboration are also insufficiently embedded within the training cycle. The optimization pathways proposed here aim to integrate psychological skills more fully into the training plan, high-pressure scenarios, personalized routines, and periodic review—supported by ongoing state monitoring and professional collaboration to strengthen the foundation for timely, evidence-informed adjustments.

The practical shift is ultimately a shift in how training is structured. Athletes should move beyond receiving generic directives such as 'focus' or 'relax' and instead repeatedly practice specific strategies for regaining focus, identifying optimal timing for mental management, and re-engaging with tactical execution following mental management. Coaches, in turn, need more than match outcomes to assess mental readiness; process-based records can help identify the next priority for training. For standard training programs and university tennis teams, sophisticated equipment or a full professional support team need not be the starting point. Establishing consistent training frequency, clearly defined personal routines, and sustainable record-keeping is more immediately achievable. Sport psychology professionals and digital tools can then be integrated incrementally as resources permit, ensuring psychological skills training occupies a continuous, integrated role within tennis-specific preparation.

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