

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MATCH PLAY IN TENNIS.

The first and most important point in match play is to know how to lose. Lose cheerfully, generously, and like a sportsman. This is the first great law of tennis, and the second is like unto it to win modestly, cheerfully, generously, and like a sportsman.

The object of match play is to win, but no credit goes to a man who does not win fairly and squarely. A victory is a defeat if it is other than fair. Yet again I say to win is the object, and to do so, one should play to the last ounce of his strength, the last gasp of his breath, and the last scrap of his nerve. If you do so and lose, the better man won. If you do not, you have robbed your opponent of his right of beating your best. Be fair to both him and yourself.

"The Play's the thing," and in match play a good defeat is far more creditable than a hollow victory. Play tennis for the game's sake. Play it for the men you meet, the friends you make, and the pleasure you may give to the public by the hard working yet sporting game that is owed them by their presence at the match.

Many tennis players feel they owe the public nothing, and are granting a favour by playing. It is my belief that when the public so honours a player that they attend matches, that player is in duty bound to give of his best, freely, willingly, and cheerfully, for only by so doing can he repay the honour paid him. The tennis star of today owes his public as much as the actor owes the audience, and only by meeting his obligations can tennis be retained in public favour. The players get their reward in the personal popularity they gain by their conscientious work.

There is another factor that is even stronger than this, that will always produce fine tennis in championship events. It is the competitive spirit that is the breath of life to every true sportsman: the desire to prove to himself he can beat the best of the other man; the real regret that comes when he wins, and feels the loser was not at his best.

The keen competitive spirit that stimulates a match player also increases the nervous strain. This should be recognized by tournament committees, and the conditions of play should be as nearly standardized as weather permits.

The first thing to fix firmly in your mind in playing a match, is never to allow your opponent to play a shot he likes if it is possible to force him to make one he does not. Study your opponent both on and off the court. Look for a weakness, and, once finding it, pound it without mercy. Remember that you do not decide your mode of attack. It is decided for you by the weakness of your opponent. If he dislikes to meet a netman, go to the net. If he wants you at the net, stay back and force him to come in. If he attacks viciously, meet his attack with an equally strong offensive.

Remember that the strongest defence is to attack, for if the other man is occupied in meeting your attack, he will have less time to formulate his own

system.

If you are playing a very steady man, do not strive to beat him at his own game. He is better at it than you in many cases, so go in and hit to win. On the other hand, if you find that your opponent is wild and prone to miss, play safe and reap the full crop of his errors. It saves you trouble and takes his confidence.

Above all, never change a winning game.

Always change a losing game, since, as you are getting beaten that way, you are no worse off and may be better with a new style.

The question of changing a losing game is a very serious thing. It is hard to say just when you are really beaten. If you feel you are playing well yet have lost the first set about 3-6 or 4-6, with the loss of only one service, you should not change. Your game is not really a losing game. It is simply a case of one break of service, and might well win the next set. If, however, you have dropped the first set in a 2 out of 3 match with but one or two games, now you are outclassed and should try something else.

Take chances when you are behind, never when ahead. Risks are only worth while when you have everything to win and nothing to lose. It may spell victory, and at least will not hasten defeat. Above all, never lose your nerve or confidence in a match. By so doing you have handed your opponent about two points a game a rather hard handicap to beat at your best.

Never let your opponent know you are worried. Never show fatigue or pain if it is possible to avoid, since it will only give him confidence. Remember that he feels just as bad as you, and any sign of weakening on your part encourages him to go on. In other words, keep your teeth always in the match.

Don't worry. Don't fuss. Luck evens up in the long run, and to worry only upsets your own game without affecting your opponent. A smile wins a lot of points because it gives the impression of confidence on your part that shakes that of the other man. Fight all the time. The harder the strain the harder you should fight, but do it easily, happily, and enjoy it.