

## Essential Tennis Podcast #127

[music] Welcome to the essential tennis podcast. If you love tennis and want to improve your game, this podcast is for you. Whether it's technique, strategy, equipment or the mental game. Tennis professional Ian Westermann is here to make you a better player and now here's Ian!

**Ian:** Hi and welcome to the essential tennis podcast, your place for free experts tennis instruction that can truly help you improve your game. Today's episode of the essential tennis podcast, is brought to you by tennistours.com. Where you can receive a discount off your next purchase of professional tennis tournament tickets by using the promotional code essential. Well welcome to today's show, thank you very much for joining me.

Before we get to today's topic that I am going to be answering for a listener I'd like to send out a special thank you to eight really awesome people, really passionate listeners of the tennis podcast. And they are the eight players who joined me on Galveston Island in Texas this past weekend and I'd just like to do a quick shoutout. Those eight people were John D, Mike, Eddie, Alex, Chris, Jean-Paul, Dennis and last but not least John M. Who is the member at Galveston Country Club. He arranged and set up everything for us. And got the courts and just basically helped me with all the administration type stuff that needed to be done. So thank you very much John. And to the eight of you, as a group you guys did awesome. It was a lot of fun working with you guys. I am really proud of the hard work you guys put in, these guys drilled and played outside for over nine hours this past weekend, in the Texas heat. In the middle of July, and you know that's impressive right there. And on top of that, we did a mental tennis clinic with David Grubin, mental expert and we did a video analysis session as well and went over one stroke of the eight participants and I gave them my feedback, frame by frame video in a group setting as well which is always a great learning experience.

So, I just want to thank you guys again. Very much for your participation. That was the fourth essential tennis clinic that I've put on. The fifth one is coming up in November. And it's already sold out. I didn't even announce it here on the podcast. It's sold out, just with the members of the forums at essentialtennis.com, so unfortunately the rest of you sort of missed out on that one. Everybody on the forum has jumped on that, but I think I am going to be scheduling another one for either January or February again in Palm Springs California. It's a great venue to hold our events, so if you think you might want to attend that one, the 6th and upcoming essential tennis clinic and work with me for a weekend on your tennis game.

Shoot me an email to [ian@essentialtennis.com](mailto:ian@essentialtennis.com) and I can give you guys early notification when I start to put the details together for that next clinic after the one in November. Alright, let's get down to business. Sit back and relax and get ready for some great tennis instruction. [music] [music] [music] [music] [music] [music] [music] [music]

Alright, let's get started on today's topic and it comes to us from Rich. Rich wrote to me and said, Tonight I played in my first USCA match for the summer season. I would say my partner and I are both

strong 3.5 players and have played together for a couple of years. We try to communicate together during the match and inter-match we got to a strong start in one pretty easily 6-0 and we are feeling pretty confident. The second set was somewhat shaky and we started out losing the first three games and then came back to tie it up with 3 all. We went down to 3-4 and came back to 4-4 and then lost the next two games to lose the second set 6-4. We did a third set tie breaker rather than a complete third set because of time constraints and we lost that 10-7. My question is, how can we maintain our mental focus after winning the first set so easily and avoid a wipedown? This seems to happen quite often, it would have been better if the first set was closer, [laughter] . Thanks Rich.

**Ian:** Yeah, funny how that happens isn't it Rich? It actually turns out you probably would have preferred mentally anyway, that that first set was competitive so you guys wouldn't have let your guard down so much. Now I got a long outline here to talk about this and by the way this is going to be the only topic I talk about today To be honest with you guys I'm just really short on time today recording this on Monday the 19th. And it's late afternoon here in the east coast. Usually I am done with my podcast by early morning and I just had, had to much going on and so this is going to be the only topic we talk about today so I really wrote a detailed outline. And I look forward to talking about this Rich. And I am going to give you and everybody else listening some really concrete things for you guys to concentrate next time you guys you get put into this position so that you don't give away another set. And even the match, after winning so easily in the first set.

So, first of all you are right. This is extremely, extremely common. That a team or a player will go out and win a first very easily and then turn around to lose the second set and even the match. When it was obvious that they were in control of the match to begin with and it's important to understand that this is not just for recreational players. I mean, so I want you to know that you shouldn't feel badly about this and for the rest of you listening. If this has ever happened to you, don't be embarrassed by it, it definitely happens to everybody to some extent or another. You know some of us are more mentally tough than others and it's really good that you identified Rich that this is a mental let down.

You said, your specific question was how to maintain your mental focus. And that's exactly the right question because obviously you and your partner had the upper hand here to begin the match. But it's important to understand that this happens even at the professional level. You guys will see this, I am not going to say commonly. But it's definitely not unheard of to have one professional player win the first set easily and then turn around and lose the second set even by quite a bit. Usually, it's not as big as a swing as what your example is, to win the first set 6-0 and then end up losing the entire the match. But trust me there's definitely large momentum swings going on back and forth even between professional matches.

Now, there's two main reasons for your momentum swing, and this particular circumstance, in this example you gave us. There's two main reasons why this occurs, and not just in your specific example but pretty much anytime that there is a large momentum swing, it's happening for two main reasons. Number one, emotional relaxation on the part of you and your partner. And this is probably the obvious one. And yet I think that a lot of recreational players don't guard against it. Basically, you and your

partner won that first set in you're probably sitting on the change over and saying, Sweet, we going to totally crush these guys.

This is no problem were having an easy match. And you know what, to be honest with you, I don't blame you for saying that and thinking that. I mean 6-0, you know the dreaded bagel, that's just a crushing, I mean you guys just thrashed them in that first set. They really didn't make it close at all. Even 6-1 or 6-2 a pretty sound beating of another team, but 6-0. Is like you guys embarrassed them.

So, I don't blame you for letting your guard down here. You and your partner, were probably already celebrating after that first set during the change over. You guys were probably sitting there during the change over and laughing and joking around with each other before that second set started. In fact, I think you said here... Here we go. Rich says we got off to a strong start and won easily 6-0 and we were feeling pretty confident. [laughter] And again I don't blame you for feeling confident. Confidence is good, that's great. However, I can just read between the lines there. When you say that you guys were feeling pretty confident. And I just know that you guys probably crossed the line between confident and a little bit over confident and that's when your guard get, I'm sorry that's when your guard got let down by both of you. Now, you most likely headed out for that second set. Again, feeling over confident and probably a little bit nonchalant to saying, ah well even if we screw around in this set, we should still be able to win.

Because that first set was so easy. And your basically thinking that the match was in the bag. So that's the number one main reason why this happened. You let your guard down emotionally, mentally and in terms of focus. You guys just definitely let your guard down. Now, the number two reason why this momentum swing occurred, and this is I don't think a lot of recreational players think about. Is that, you have to realize that your opponents are going to come out fighting twice as hard as they did at the end of the [inaudible]... I'm sorry, they are going to come out fighting twice early in the second set as they were late in the first set. So you guys probably sat down on your bench or in your chairs at the end of that first set kind of with a picture in your mind of how that first set went. And you were thinking about how those opponents were playing at the end of the first set.

More than likely, they were pretty dejected. I mean they just gotten completely beat down in that first set. And they probably at that point after going down 4-0, after going down 5-0, they probably weren't giving you their full effort at that point. And I wouldn't blame them for not giving a hundred percent when they are down four or five games to none in a set. We'll see this happen all the time at a professional level as well. It's not just amateur players. However, after that first set is done they get a fresh start in the second set. Now, obviously they are down a set so, now were going to talk about that individually. They lost the first set and so maybe they are maybe they are down on themselves for that reason. However, they come out after that first set change over and the score is 0-0, they get to start all over again. The first set is completely done. And they get a totally new shot at you and your partner. In terms of the set. So, after getting crushed in that first set. Basically they have two choices. Emotionally or tactically. They can change nothing and just basically accept that they're going to lose because they just got killed in that first set. It was even close.

So, I mean I could see it would be possible that they could walk back out for the second set and be saying to themselves, well it looks like this match is going to be over quickly, you want grab a beer after this. Where do you want to go for dinner? You know, whatever. It's possible that could happen and you and your partner and still let your guard down and still win without a whole lot of trouble. However, the second way that they could react after losing that first set is to change their tactics and fight twice as hard to even the match in that second set. And in my opinion, that second reaction is much more likely. I mean, these guys came out to play a USTA match.

So, really what do you think they are going to do, given those two choices. Seeing as these guys have taken the time to work on their game. To feel pretty confident and competent about their tennis in the first place to go sign up for a USTA league team. They must be at least a little bit competitive and you and your partner should assume that they are probably going to fight twice as hard in the second set as they did in the first. Both in terms of tactics, and also in terms of just kind of basic energy level and effort. So, when you look at these two elements Rich, you'll see that we kind of have a perfect storm for momentum change.

First of all, you and your partner are relaxed. You're enjoying yourself, you're kind of blasting in the glory of that easy first set. And then secondly, your opponents are both about to fight harder than at any other point in the match. They want to kind of vindicate themselves here in the second set. And if they are going to have any chance of winning this match. They know they have to pick up their games. And both tactically and physically and emotionally really come out strong and fighting hard for this second set. So when you combine those two things together, it's a really dangerous environment for you and your partner. Next we are going to be talking about how to avoid these kind of momentum swings but before we do that, I just want to remind you guys about the official sponsor of the tennis podcast.

And that is [tennistours.com](http://tennistours.com) championship tennis tours. They've been putting together individually tickets and ticket packages to professional tennis tournaments since 1987 and they do tickets for events all over the world and all over the United States. So, you guys should definitely check them out if you're planning on going to a tennis tournament or if you know if one is coming to your area. Now, the big one coming up here in the U.S. is the U.S. Open and obviously everybody here in the U.S. is excited about that and especially if you live close to New York City. And I'm planning on hopefully being there. I think the second weekend we're going to be doing a cocktail party, myself and Will Hamilton from Fuzzy Yellow Balls and championship tennis tours are kind of going to team together for this and if you purchase tickets it's for the U.S. Open and use my promotional code which is, "essential" as you check out, not only will you get a discount, but you'll also receive an exclusive invitation to that cocktail party which is going to be in Times Square. Which is pretty cool. So go check them out at [tennistours.com](http://tennistours.com).

The discounts, I think it applies to purchases of \$175 or more but you guys can mix and match tickets when you check out for the U.S. Open they have tickets available for every session of everyday and different seating choices for each of those days and sessions as well. So go check them out. Again, that's at [tennistours.com](http://tennistours.com) and don't forget to use the promotional code, "essential" that shows them that you

appreciate their support of the essential tennis podcast.

Alright, let's go ahead and move on to our final topic for today's show and that is how to actually avoid these kind of momentum swings. And, I am going to give you guys three step process to trying to not do what happened Rich and his partner here after winning their first set 6-0 and then losing the match. First of all, you have to have an awareness of this situation. Both setting up and occurring kind of being in the middle of this kind of situation and this is just one of those many things in tennis that sound easy but actually putting it into practice and remembering it on the court in the middle of the match, can be something that is pretty tricky. You know, it's easier said than done kind of thing.

But after you and your partner or you when you are playing the singles match, win the first set, especially by a lot, you have to keep in mind this dynamic and this kind of set up for a possible fall or possible change in momentum. So that this is step number one, now that you guys have heard me talk about it and describe why it happens. Next time you go out onto a tennis court to play a competitive match. Step number one, is being aware of this situation.

Step number two, you need to redouble your efforts and awareness tactically. So, as far as what you are doing strategically on the court you need to kind of redouble what you're doing. Definitely, redouble your awareness of what's going on. It's very likely your opponents will try something new after losing that first set. At least if they are smart. [laughter] If they lose the first set, 6-0 and come out for the second set and do exactly the same thing that they did in the first set. Then they're just dumb [laughter].

I mean, I'm just going to go ahead and say it like it is. These guys are not very intelligent. Expect that they are going to do something different. And if you are playing doubles like Rich was. Some examples of that might be, maybe they'll start playing double back or in an "I" formation, maybe a change of their formation and how they approach their points to give you and your partner a different look and try something tactically. Maybe they'll switch sides and instead of returning on the deuce side, the stronger player will return from the ad side. That's something that they have the option of doing after the first set. Maybe, instead of staying in a one up, one back position kind of the a traditionally formation for recreational players.

Maybe they'll start to serve and volley and return in volley. And they'll get really aggressive and both of them will come up to the net to try to finish up points quickly instead of staying back. These are examples of changes that you have to be ready for and not only do you have to be ready for them to mix things up and try something different. But then you have to make adjustments accordingly right away and Rich didn't talk about this, he didn't mention exactly what changed in this set. He didn't say if his opponents mixed up anything tactically. But I would be willing to bet that at least something changed.

I'd be very very surprised if Rich and his partner won the first set 6-0 and then their opponents continued to play the exactly same way and then ended up winning the match. To be honest with you, the chances of that happening even if Rich and his partner got too relaxed and let they guard down. The chances of that happening is not very good. I would bet that they did something different tactically.

So, don't wait, change your tactics and counter whatever they do immediately. Don't wait until you are suddenly behind three games in the second set to say, 'Aw crap we won the first set easily and they in second set they change things up on us. We weren't really paying attention and now we're way behind in the second set. Don't let that happen to you. And you are going to avoid that by being aware of what's going on. And this goes back to step number one-- be aware of the situation in general and then step number two was be aware of what's happening tactically on the court.

So those are the first two steps. Step number three is you have to re-redouble your efforts mentally and emotionally. And this is one that kind of goes without saying as well-- but listen guys, this might be the most important part of my whole outline on this topic.

Do not let your guard down after winning the first set easily-- especially if it is easily. Even if you win the first set 7-6 or 6-4-- just one break of serve or in a tie-breaker. Don't let your guard down. But especially if you win by a lot... And you guys might think it's opposite and it might be. Listen, I'm going to admit-- it might be the case that after you win 6-1 in the set, your opponent might just have a little temper tantrum and feel sorry for themselves and might just go home emotionally speaking and not even try for the second set. That's possible however, if you are going to play a match and somebody is really going to hustle and try, it's probably going to be after they get crushed in the first set. And they want to have some kind of chance of making it respectable in the second set.

That's when you really want to guard against a big come-back from your opponent. Not only is it probably most likely that they are going to pick up their game and change things up, but these are the most disappointing losses as tennis players. When we are up by a lot and give away that lead and lose the match-- it's terrible.

Now, I'm going to leave you guys with a really good quote that I remember. Mental toughness expert David Grumping saying on a previous episode of the Essential Tennis Podcast... This isn't a direct quote but I'm pretty sure I've got the jist of it-- he said that, 'you should never have the thoughts in your head that you are just maintaining a lead. You are either building on it or you are losing it.

Let me say that again. Never think that you are going to maintain your lead in a tennis match, you are either building your lead-- you should be either trying to build your lead and if you aren't doing that, you're probably losing your lead. And this is kind of a mental thing.

If you go out there with the attitude, 'Alright, we won the first set easily and we're just going to keep doin what we're doing and no big deal. This match is going to be over soon.' That's exactly when your lead starts slipping away.

When you walk out there on the second set, after winning the first set easily, you need to have the mental tenacity and the mental focus to say, 'Alright, not only are we going to play just as well in the second set, we are going to play better. We are going to focus even harder because more than likely,

our opponents are really going to try and fight back here and we need to keep them pushed down and we need to keep them behind in this match. So we are going to play even better tennis in this second set than we did in the first.

And this is something that very few recreational players have the mental toughness and the focus to be able to do.

But now that you guys have this outline, hopefully you guys will start to implement this and use it in your matches and go out and win the first set easily and then win the second set 6-0 as well.

Have the focus to be able to do that.

So just as a review here of the 3 steps to avoid the situation-- number one, be aware of it. Number two, re-double your efforts and your awareness tactically and number three, re-double your efforts mentally and emotionally.

So stay strong. So Rich, hopefully that answers your question. I really enjoyed talking about this topic. I probably spent a little bit longer than I normally would on it just because I knew I was going to answer just one question today. But it's a fun topic to talk about and this is something that really commonly happens and I hope it's going to be a great help to all of you guys listening about it. Go out there and implement this and I'd be curious to hear feedback from you Rich and everybody else listening as well.

Let me know if this makes sense and I'd love to hear some stories of you guys actually using this successfully.

So Rich, thanks a lot for your great question and good luck with your tennis as you continue to work hard. [music] [music] [music]

Alright, that does it for episode 127 of the Essential Tennis Podcast.

Thank you very much for joining me today. Thank you for downloading the show and for listening to it. I appreciate your support of the show. Just by doing that, it honestly means a lot to me just to know that there are people out there that appreciate the time and effort that I put into this show-- doing it free every week and I look forward to continuing to do it.

If you ever have any questions for me that you'd like me to answer, on the show, you can always send me an email to [lan@essentialtennis.com](mailto:lan@essentialtennis.com) or you can go to [essentialtennis.com](http://essentialtennis.com) and click contact and there is a little form there and you can select podcasts-- you can fill out the form there to submit a question for the podcast-- just select podcast.

Alright, that does it for this week. Again thanks very much everybody, take care and good luck with your tennis. [music] [music]