

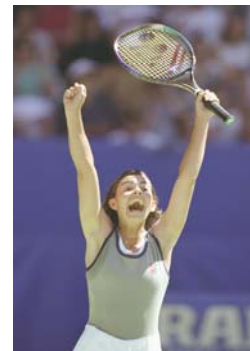
VISUALIZE VICTORY

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Every player knows the sensations involved when playing great tennis. The experience contains distinctive sounds, bodily sensations, looks, tastes, smells and emotions. There is the hush of the crowd; the bounce of the ball. The smell and sound of a new can of balls being popped open. The taste of the sports drink you sipped on the last end change. The familiar and effortless movements as you serve, toss the ball, reach up and connect with it. The lines seem sharp and clear; the ball appears huge as a grapefruit. You feel all the emotions that accompany a great performance: confidence, focus, and joy.

Smart players know that playing fantastic tennis is not just about hours spent practicing on the court or working out in the gym. Mental rehearsal and visualization techniques are an essential part of a Champion's training regime. These techniques are effective and they have the bonus of not wearing out your body.

Work out like a Champion; add visualization into your practice routines today.



All Tennis Photos:
Getty Images

What is Visualization?



Visualization or guided imagery is the process of creating a scene in the athlete's mind that refers to her best performances or the outcome she wants to happen. It is a bit like creating a movie where every detail of her performance is recorded.

Visualization can involve ANY or ALL the senses:

- Visual (pictures and images)
- Auditory (sound)
- Taste
- Kinesthetic (how the body and muscles feel)
- Olfactory (smell)
- Emotions (feelings)

Using her mind, the player can recall these images of great tennis over and over, enhancing her skills through repetition, just as she would do with physical practice. Mental practice using imagery enables her to improve her on-court performance.

“SEE your Future, BE your Future.” - Joe Namath, Former Champion football player

Mind - Body Link: How Visualization Works

When **Gabriela Sabatini** won the 1990 US Open, she said that she “...pictured winning every point. I visualized winning the whole tournament, never letting Steffi Graf into the match”.

Visualization works in a variety of ways to enhance performance. It can be used to:

- Reduce anxiety
- Build confidence
- Improve tennis strokes and skills
- Rehearse game plans, strategies & routines
- Increase motivation
- Manage mistakes and distractions
- Prepare for on-court scenarios
- Increase focus

The brain acts like a computer when you perform a skill (e.g. a backhand). It decides which and how muscles contract. Researchers have discovered that **imagining** physical movements activated all the same areas of the brain as do actual physical movements.

- Mental rehearsal puts the brain through a nervous system workout similar to the real thing.
- Mental rehearsal “grooves” the nervous pathways facilitating the development of motor skills.



MIND MOVES

Relax: To be most effective, visualization should be conducted in a relaxed state of mind.

- Relaxation can be learned. (Read the Physically Speaking topic, "Relaxation Techniques" for more information).
- Some simple relaxation pointers include:
 - ✓ Let your lower jaw drop and allow your facial muscles to relax.
 - ✓ Let your shoulders drop, and arms dangle. Shake them to decrease excess tension.
 - ✓ Practice this "Progressive Relaxation" off the court: lie down in a comfortable place.
 - ✓ Gradually tighten, and then release all major muscle groups in your body.
 - ✓ Work progressively from head to toe. Start by tightening and releasing your facial muscles, and work your way down the body. Finish by letting your whole body go limp.



Breathe: Practice slow controlled breathing.

- Inhale through your nose, feel your abdomen and lower ribs expand, and then exhale through your mouth.
- Slow, controlled breathing using your diaphragm helps you relax your muscles and your mind.
- The Primary Health Care Providers (PHCPs) can help you learn diaphragmatic breathing.

Engage all your senses

- Effective visualization is more than just seeing an image; it uses all your senses.
- Make sure you see, feel the physical and emotional sensations, hear, smell and taste the whole experience.

"Athletes must understand that there's only so much work you can put in, so many hours in the day, so much gas in the tank. The trick is to keep the quality at high level, to train efficiently."
Earl Bell, 1984 Olympic Pole Vault Bronze Medalist

Two Types of Visualization: Mastery and Coping



Mastery Visualization involves mentally rehearsing your own "masterful" performance. Visualizing yourself "mastering" a skill can mentally and physically support your training goals.

Coping Visualization involves mentally rehearsing yourself successfully coping with a difficult, challenging, or common competitive situation (e.g., fighting back from 1 set down, overcoming fatigue).

With both mastery and coping visualization, it is important to **create positive images** of the process used to achieve success as well as the successful outcome itself. A video tape of you successfully executing a skill can help set the idea of what you are striving to accomplish. Combined with training, practice, repetition and feedback, video can be an excellent addition to visualization practice.

Consider imagery as a way to assist you gain control of the skill, not to predict the outcome. If you continue to visualize a mistake, you need to reprogram your image to be more positive.

- Use key words that relate to how your body and mind feels when you play the shot well.
- Imagine the total skill, so all aspects of a movement are interlinked.
- With coping visualization, consider rewinding your mental tape and correcting the mistake.
- To gain control, you may want to slow down your image, like watching a slow motion replay, and ensure each component is smooth, easy and coordinated. As you make a movement more accurate, speed it up to real time and keep good timing and precision.

Get the Mental and Physical Edge

For an athlete, visualization can provide valuable and effective mental practice without increasing physical pressure on the body. It is perfect for YOU, an elite athlete whose body is under intense and prolonged training loads for many weeks of the year. Replace some physical practice sessions with visualization and mental practice. It can help prevent and speed recovery from injuries and illnesses.

- Use visualization as part of your pre-tournament preparation, and during tournaments to help you before and during matches to give you the mental edge.
- To master visualization, you need to practice it over and over, until it becomes automatic and easy. A qualified sports psychologist can help you. (Speak to the PHCPs if you need help to find a professional to assist you learn or perfect your visualization skills).
- Get the advantage on and off the court; use mental imagery and rehearsal and visualize **your** next victory.

