**Court Order: David Sammel** 

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Locker Room Power and Gaining the Psychological Edge

becomes during a tough match.

concentration, and their approach to imparting advice.

The 2012 Australian Open final between Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal highlighted the complex range of skills needed to play at the highest level - a six-hour test of brutal physical endurance, mental focus and emotional control that delivered tennis of the highest class even at the very end, when fatigue was almost absolute. We teamed up with David Sammel to explore high performance in elite tennis to examine how tennis champions gain a psychological edge, and

talked to two of the sport's top coaches, Marian Vajda, who has coached Novak Djokovic since

Monica Seles and Robin Soderling, about the essential traits of a champion, different forms of

2006, and Claudio Pistolese, who has coached five top 10 players over the last 15 years, including

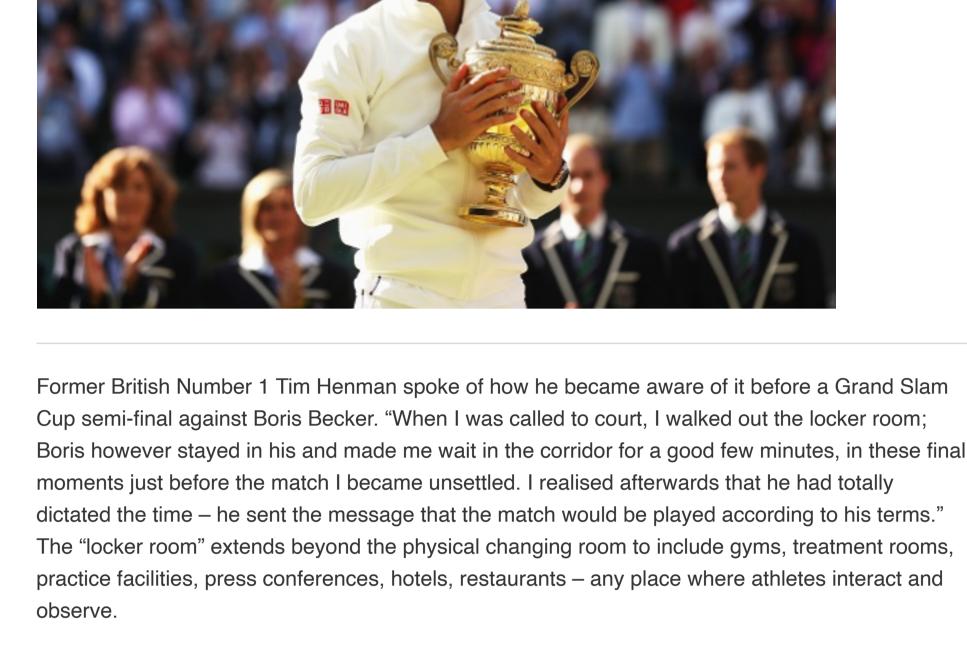
In tennis, you will often hear people say: "It wasn't about forehands and backhands; you could just

tell he was going to win; he had that look about him" or "That contest was won before the game

Tennis examines willpower and the solidity of a person's self-belief like almost no other

sport and it is not easy to find parallels with the lonely, gladiatorial place a tennis court

began". In their view, the eventual winner had created a psychological competitive edge over the opponent, something that can be termed Locker Room Power (LRP). LRP is a positive aura that surrounds an athlete and can be thought of as the "X-Factor in competition". It's the culmination of practice, intent, and commitment that creates a fear factor which can sap an opponent's desire and self-belief. With effective LRP, many matches are indeed as good as won before a player steps on court. It can cause opponents to lose confidence during a tough match, or allow doubt to creep into their mind in a crisis. It is the ingredient that makes opponents feel nervous and prone to mistakes. Simply put, it is the myth that adds to the reality.



an athlete's reputation and uses it to control competitive performance and results. An athlete with LRP is discussed positively by other athletes, which creates an impression of invincibility. In sport the talk surrounding a player determines how well his game is perceived. **Countering Locker Room Power** Managing to ignore the reputation of an opponent, to simply compete against the person or team on the day, is one of the hardest aspects in sport. The best way to counter a reputation is for an athlete to build their own. Once they have created an aura, the impact it can have on the locker room and the surrounding environments is vast. The private moments preparing for a contest are

crucial to a successful performance, because it is during these times that a competitor will buy into

his opponent's LRP, become complacent or overconfident about his own, or do what a true

circumstances. Since athletes are human, the focus required to remain in this zone is always

Top competitors therefore need tools to deal with a loss of focus to still compete almost as

from the opponent and their threats to the player's self and their own weapons.

effectively, even when their perfect competitive state is breached. It is important to have weapons

task. LRP takes a reactive mind-set and turns it into a proactive mind-set. In so doing, focus shifts

that can penetrate the opponent's focus because beating someone who is in the flow is a tough

competitor does – psych themselves up to play hard from beginning to end whatever the

subject to attack and penetration.

In environments surrounding competition, the athletes and the finer details of their lifestyles are

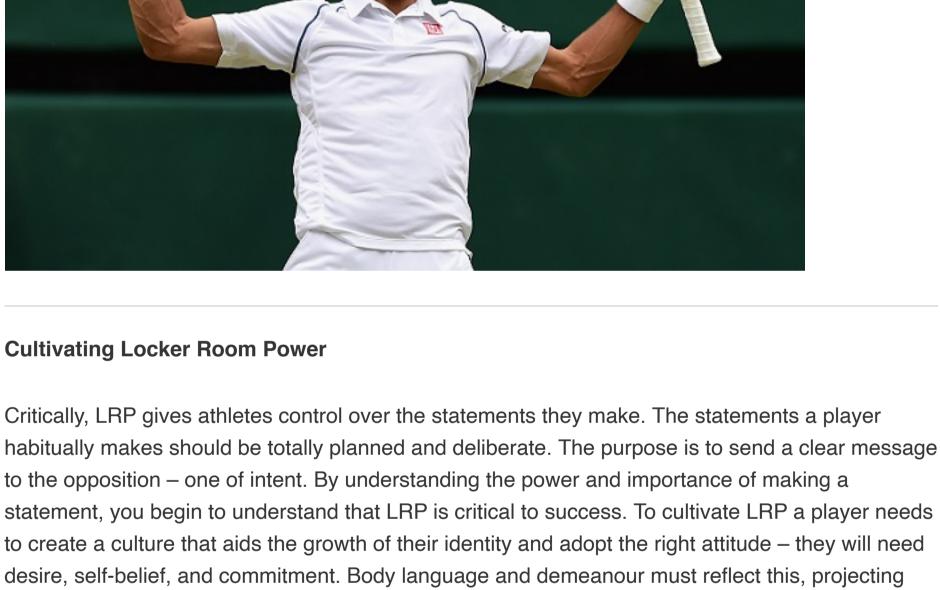
magnified and scrutinised, and combine to create a perception of the athlete. This perception then

becomes crucial. What other people or fellow competitors hear and see in the locker room affects

their perception of the athlete and consequently the athlete's LRP. It encompasses reputation, but

other players talking about his game in a way that creates a positive aura. In essence, LRP takes

it doesn't stop there. It is the perception that a player is better than he actually is, generated by



confidence and determination over nerves and fear. It can build, for example, during a tournament

when a player makes a strong play or wins a match and creates a wave of confidence. This force,

however temporary, can become the catalyst for long-term LRP. Building LRP is similar to creating

The key is that this campaign is built on substance, not spin. If you advertise a bad product well, it

competition. On any level this is double-edged. Opponents think you are invincible and in turn you

Still, no player is perfect. What sets apart players with LRP is that they bring positive energy to the

begin to feel immensely confident. This combination is very hard to beat.

arena, no matter what. There is, of course, no way of avoiding loss. Everyone loses. However, win or lose, it is the quality of attitude and strategies employed during the loss that opponents will remember. Even during a rout, a champion tries to create something to build on. Indeed, losing can become a key facet of consolidating and maintaining LRP. Losing is a great test of discipline, and players who possess long-standing LRP know how to pick themselves up again and regroup. All eyes will be watching to see if a player can manage a bad spell without letting it develop into a crisis of confidence. Respect from other players means that a few bad results will be perceived as a glitch, rather than a crisis.

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## can work against easily impressed and inexperienced players; but bluffing is not sustainable in the long run. By offering a strong product, the "advertising campaign" of LRP will lead people to exaggerate the strength and authority of that product – sporting weaponry, in this case. This exaggeration, in turn, will unsettle opponents and lead them to feel they are out of their depth in a

The Mark of a Champion

an 'advertising campaign' of abilities.

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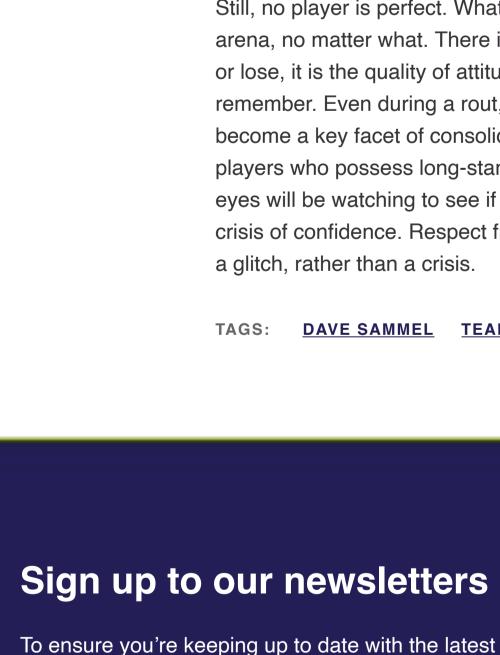
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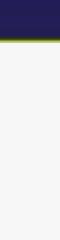
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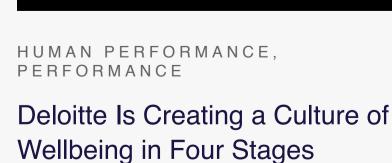
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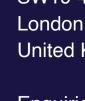


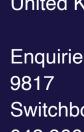
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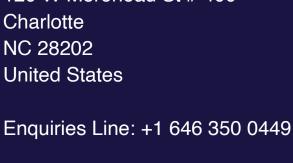
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