

Antoni Girod



After an experience of over fifteen years on court as a tennis coach (Professeur Level 2 in France), and in particular with juniors, Antoni specialized in mental training and communication. For five years he was an applied-psychology teacher for the Sports Science Department at the University of Montpellier. He is now a member of the educational team of the French NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) Institute of Paris and, as a consultant for Halifax Consulting, works with major companies such as Dell or Walt Disney. He is a certified pratician in sophrology and ericksonian hypnosis.

For more than ten years, he has been working with top athletes as a mental coach in many different sports. For example, Cyril SAULNIER (Tennis) ex n°48 ATP, Guillaume NERY (Free diving) four-fold world record holder of dynamic free diving, Philippe PRESTI (Sailing) double World Champion of Finn, member of team BMW Oracle winner of the 2010 America's Cup.

Since 2001, he is a regular speaker for the ITF and he is involved in different coaches education programs for Tennis Federations all over the world.

Antoni writes a monthly article on mental training for Tennis Magazine in France and is the author of many reference books about mental training and communication, in particular : “Winning at tennis – Learn from the Champions”, “TMK Method” and “Racky discovers the secrets of the mind”.

Video and bio feed-back in stress management

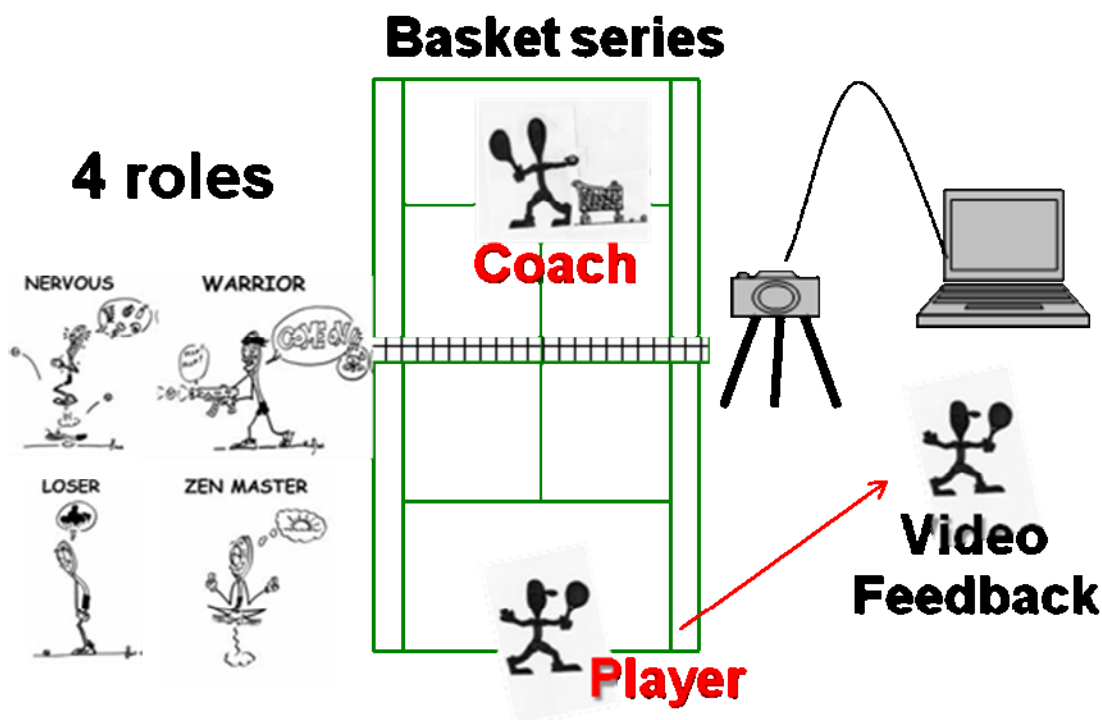
In order to be able to manage stress in competition, before using any technique, a player first needs to become aware of how he looks like in terms of body language when under pressure and what he feels inside in terms of physiology and emotional state.

This external and internal feedback is essential for triggering the desire to change his attitude if necessary in match and to learn and use effectively stress management techniques on court during a match, such as breathing for example.

1/ Video feedback (filming the outside) :

During a match, a player's body language is an open book about his mental and emotional state. By becoming aware of his body language, the player gives himself a powerful lever for his thoughts and emotions. Indeed the body, the mind and emotions represent the three poles of human functioning. They form a coherent system in which any change in one of the poles leads to a change in the two others. Thus, by altering his body language, a player can very quickly shift from a negative inner state to a positive one.

Here is an example of an on court body language drill with video feed back :



Four players do a basket drill. At each passage they adopt a different body language profile (Loser, Zen Master, Nervous, Warrior). After each passage, they can view themselves on the laptop related to the camera and see how they look like when adopting the profiles.

The aim is to get the players to experience positive and negative attitudes in order to help them become aware of the impact of body language on their inner state and on how they are perceived from outside by the opponent.

Then, they can play points and adopt only the Zen Master and Warrior attitudes

2/ Bio feedback (filming the inside) :

Heart rate variability is a measure of the beat-to-beat changes in heart rate. The heart at rest was once thought to operate much like a metronome, faithfully beating out a regular, steady rhythm. Scientists and physicians now know, however, that this is far from the case. Rather than being monotonously regular, the rhythm of a healthy heart--even under resting conditions--is actually surprisingly irregular, with the time interval between consecutive heartbeats constantly changing. This naturally occurring beat-to-beat variation in heart rate is called **heart rate variability (HRV)**.

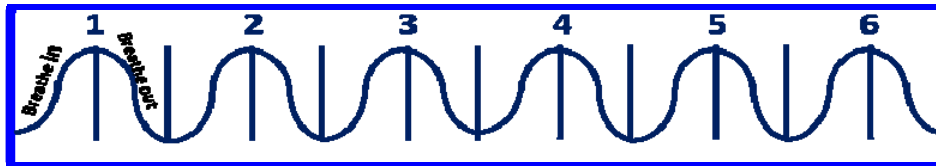
The normal variability in heart rate is due to the synergistic action of the two branches of the autonomic nervous system (ANS)--the part of the nervous system that regulates most of the body's internal functions. The sympathetic nerves act to accelerate heart rate, while the parasympathetic (vagus) nerves slow it down. The sympathetic and parasympathetic branches of the ANS are continually interacting to maintain cardiovascular activity in its optimal range and to permit appropriate reactions to changing external and internal conditions. The analysis of HRV therefore serves as a dynamic window into the function and balance of the autonomic nervous system.

The moment-to-moment variations in heart rate are generally overlooked when average heart rate is measured (for example, when your doctor takes your pulse over a certain period of time and calculates that your heart is beating at, say, 70 beats per minute). However, certain biofeedback softwares allows us to observe our heart's changing rhythms in real time. Scientists and physicians consider HRV to be an important indicator of our ability to adapt effectively to stress and environmental demands.

Here is an example of a training session with a player :



In the first part of the exercise, the coach asks the player to think of a stressful situation during a recent match. The physiological response is the one corresponding to “emotional chaos”. Then, the coach asks the player to practice a simple breathing technique (the “wave” technique). And immediately, the player can instantaneously visualize the obvious change in the graphic on the screen reflecting the quick change in his physiology.



The « wave » technique : *Breathe in while counting to 5 then breathe out while counting to 5. While breathing, visualize waves. One wave corresponds to 10 s; 6 waves correspond to 1 mn.*

The aim is to get the players to become aware of the impact of their thoughts and their breathing behavior on their physiology and their emotional state.

Applications in tennis :

- **Before a match**, in order to get rid of stress, do 6 waves while waiting for the match
- **During the 5 mn warm up** on court with the opponent, in case of tension, breathe in when preparing then breathe out when hitting the ball
- **Between points**, when under pressure or frustrated by the result of the previous point, while walking to the fence, breathe in for 5 steps then breathe out for 5 steps
- **At change overs**, do 3 waves in order to get calm and to recuperate

