

Interview with Rene Simpson - Part 2

Q: What do you find most challenging, when travelling with a team of players?

A: When you are travelling with a group or team of player's you have to be organized in order to ensure that everything is accomplished in a smooth manner on any given day. Your organization is a reflection not only of you but the team as well.

Q: How do you feel about developing relationships with players?

A: Certainly I don't try to be friends with the team members, but I do want them to feel that they can get whatever they need from me. Most importantly they need to feel like everything is running smoothly and "not chaotic" as they are heading into matches, I want them to be able to concentrate solely on the match ahead.

Q: What is your greatest strength when out on the road?

A: I try to be understanding and sympathetic towards each of the player's. I feel like I understand the subtleties that occur during a match that possibly some coaches who didn't play may not appreciate. Certainly coaches who may have not played have strengths in other areas that I don't have, but I feel quite confident in handling anything potentially stress related. Drawing on my past experiences I'm able to reflect on what they may be feeling at that moment and pass on any insight to what I may have felt in that similar situation. I think that I am able to pick out the most relevant details during the match and pass it on to the player as one of my greatest strengths.

Q: How do you handle a player who feels like they choking in a match? What suggestions or solutions can you provide for the player?

A: Most importantly to overcome any "choking" there needs to be an awareness that it's happening to effectively deal with it. Especially in situations that may have occurred in one or two previous matches and is now getting into the players mind. I try to sit down with the player and devise some sort of strategy that will help them to effectively deal with choking before it starts happening in the match. It could be in different areas that we choose to find a solution, such as use of positive self- talk, aiming for larger target areas or focusing on breathing. More than anything you need to develop rituals or some sort of strategy to deal with the situation before they start occurring and by addressing this early on prepares them for the next time it happens.

Q: What do you do to prepare players for an upcoming match?

A: First, I try and get a little scouting report on the opponent either by watching them play or speaking with someone who may have some information about a certain player. It is critical that you compile some information in order to formulate a game plan for your player. We then discuss the information, ideally prior to the player's practice sessions so they can prepare accordingly. Then prior to competition after the players have warmed up leading to the match I will speak with them for 5-10 minutes to go over some final details. I only do this for a short time frame to give them some final suggestions such as patterns of play they can expect, percentage of serves for themselves and what to try in case of a certain

scenario. It may include possible solutions for whatever pattern of play they can expect of their opponent. At the end, I tell them to play well and enjoy the whole match experience.

Q: What do you feel are the main areas that we need to improve upon with our Canadian players?

A: Probably the biggest area we are lacking is a confidence in our abilities. This is the most important component to becoming better international players. I find it very frustrating as a coach to see this lack of confidence in our better player's. How we effectively change this is really our biggest challenge. We are not able to deal with pressure the same way players from other countries are able to deal with it. It's important that our player's travel with coaches who have strong personalities and have confidence in the groups they are travelling with. Then the coach can reveal to them that other player's from different countries also have weaknesses and they can expose them. The fact that they are from another country should not be reason alone to struggle with or fear a particular player.

Q: Are there any other areas you feel we should work on?

A: The one area I continually go back to is the lack of consistency in our better players and others as well. This lack of consistency is something I feel strongly about and I'm not sure we stress that enough. Our players need to be able to hit more balls in play and limit the number of unforced errors. Our players have difficulty maintaining rallies of 8-10 balls which they need to do at times. We need to continually work on and improve in this area to have more success at international levels.

In today's game, once the better players are provided with an opportunity during the course of a point they capitalize on it. We need to make sure our players stay in the point longer and wait for the right time to go for their shots. Our player's have a tendency to go for big shots too early in points. We really are not able to rally long enough in a crosscourt manner as this is something they should and can do with regular consistency drills to build a solid foundation for your game.

We would like to thank Rene for her great insights with her coaching experiences