

Five Ways to Build Confidence

1. Visualize success

Method: Recall a past performance when you played well, such as the time you served two aces in a row. As you approach the service line, replay that experience in your mind. This technique is motivating and works to create a consistent, confident mindset.

Homework: Keep a written log detailing your best performances and read them periodically. This will keep the details vivid and facilitate your ability to visualize the experiences.

2. Use positive self-talk

Method: Forget that you choked in the last set. Chastising yourself with "I should've...", "I can't...", or "I'm such a #@!..." type statements only interferes with your performance. According to research, such negative thoughts can divert your attention from play for as long as nine minutes.

Homework: Write down positive self-statements in a log and read them daily. Such statements should be made in the present tense as in, "I am well prepared," "I expect to play well."

3. Use a system of goals and rewards

Method: Setting a goal and reward system is not only motivating, but it also creates more discipline in both training and play.

Homework: Write down your goals, both short and long term, and determine what rewards would be satisfying to you once the goals are met.

4. Act confident

Method: Poor posture or a tentative gait can not only cue your opponent to your weaknesses, but also cue your own body and mind to play in a less confident manner. It is often necessary to "fake it until you make it" until you achieve a level of confidence with which you are comfortable.

Homework: I often suggest that high school and college athletes practice their "confidence walk" and this is a concept we can all employ. Practice in front of a mirror standing tall, eyes focused straight ahead, walking at a steady, sure pace.

5. Be a role model

Method: Set an example for others with your positive attitude and sportsmanship. Be aware of the image you project and consider the impact it may have on others.

Homework: Read articles about athletes you admire. Compile a list of the positive traits, traits they share and aspire to achieve their level of sportsmanship and confidence.

Following these recommendations will put you on the track towards greater confidence and a heightened awareness of the athlete you are striving to become!