WIN THE BALL NOW

AUTHOR

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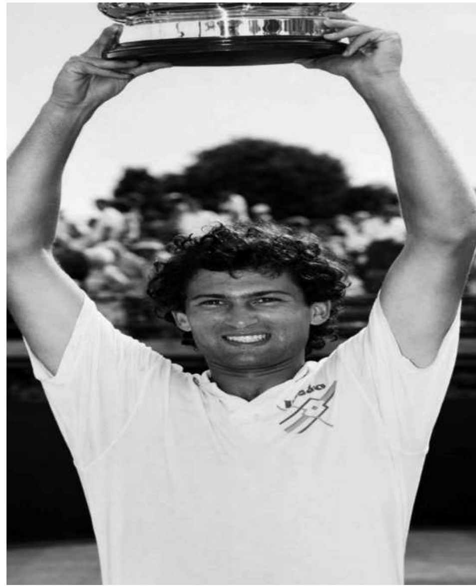

Christian Saceanu —author

Christian is a former professional tennis player with an impressive career, playing against Agassi, Sampras among others

When Christian was 18 years old he got his first ATP tour ranking and soon after, at the age of 19, he was among the top 100 tennis players in the world.

He came in the 1/8 final in Wimbledon and Australian Open. In total Christian played 28 Grand Slams

After a long impressive career Christian moved to Denmark teaching tennis.

“As a professional everything is about winning or losing all the time. My new goal in life, is more about having an amazing every day, make it count and spend as much time with family and my 5 children and 3 grandchildren”.

For the kids I coach - for me it is important to keep the dream alive but more importantly teach them to enjoy the road to it. If you want to go pro – you have to find a mindset that allows you to live on the court and live for your tennis. Selfconfidence many has – but selfworth is the most important skill on the court. If you mentally can handle the challenge it will get you far”.

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The glass

Is your glass half empty or half full?

What if it’s enough just to *have* the glass?

Watch your thoughts !

Thoughts become your words.

Words become your actions.

Actions become your habits.

Habits become your character.

Character become your destiny.

Destiny become your legacy .

All we truly have is the present moment !

The past is gone and you can not change it.

Heavy weight of the past baggage holds you back.

The future is uncertain and you can not predict it.

Right here,right now -life is full of magic, lessons, unexpected beauty and success.

Simply be here, without expectations, no regrets,trusting in life with a open heart.

The joy of now become yours new path of purpose .

Body , mind and soul are in harmony and ready to shine.

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Introduction

Becoming a strong person like a big tree

There are moments in life that bring everything to a stillness—moments that challenge everything we thought we knew about ourselves. For me , this book was a deep awakening. It has been a quiet unfolding, a return to my roots. What began as a season of inner reflection became a reckoning with my true nature—a journey toward becoming not something new, but something unshakably whole. I am not here just to show off and consume and entertain and want to bear fruits —I am here to be my self in the core like a strong tree.For much of my life, I felt the pressure to produce, to

bloom, to prove my worth through outcomes that others could see and measure. I pushed myself to meet expectations, to chase definitions of success that were never truly mine. I confused growth with constant output, and strength with productivity. But deep beneath the surface, there was always a quiet, grounded self waiting to be heard.At some point in this stillness, something shifted. I stopped focusing on what I could offer the world and started listening to what was already rooted within me. I began to feel the strength of simply standing tall. Not for show, not for praise—but because it is in my nature to endure, to hold, to be. I no longer needed to chase the sun—I had already planted myself beneath it.

The more I returned to this rooted self, the more I felt the pressure fall away. The need to impress, strive, to achieve—it all began to compost into something richer: acceptance, presence, peace. I began to understand that true strength is not in how much we can produce, but in how deeply we can stand—through storms, through seasons, through silence.

This newfound peace is not loud. It doesn't demand to be seen. It lives in the quiet resilience of a tree standing through winter, knowing that even without blossoms, it is still alive. It is the kind of knowing that doesn't need validation. I no longer seek to be admired for my results , but to be anchored in my essence. To be strong without hardness, to bend without breaking.

And then, as life tends to do, it handed me a truth that brought everything into sharper focus. Just like the tree whose life is marked not by the quantity of its harvest but by the depth of its presence, I came to understand that my worth is not tied to what I do , but how fully I root myself in the time I have.

In this soil of awareness, my creativity has deepened. Each practice is no longer just an expression of what I do , but of what I *am*. I do not impress, but to *remember*. To remind myself of the wind I can withstand, the storms I've survived, the quiet beauty of simply being. My work is no longer performance—it is presence. A testament to life lived deeply, not just visibly.

This journey is the greatest liberation of all: to realize you were never broken, only buried. Not a butterfly meant to flutter and fade, but a tree—firm, rooted, and unshaken. Not here just to blossom, but to stand. To endure. To be. There are moments in life that bring everything to a stillness—moments that challenge everything we thought we knew about ourselves. But deep beneath the surface, there was always a quiet, grounded self waiting to be heard.

It is the kind of knowing that doesn't need validation. I no longer seek to be admired for my fruit, but to be anchored in my essence. To be strong without hardness, to bend without breaking. Not here just to blossom, but to stand. to endure. To be.

Introduction inspired by E.E. Johnson ,artist and life explorer

Thanks to my wife Pernille my children Victoria, Olivia, Viitus, Villads, Villum and grand children Otto,Kalle,Sven Erik

Thanks to all my friends,hik tennis club, working team, doubles partners, tennis school children and never2late .

Chapter 1 :Three games at once

The Mental Game, Within the Score Game, Within the Life Game

Every time a tennis player walks onto the court, they agree — whether they know it or not — to play three games simultaneously. The first is the one you can see: the score, the sets, the points ticking up on the board. The second is invisible to anyone watching: the war happening inside the player's own mind. And the third is the one that neither the scoreboard nor the mind can fully contain — the larger game of a life, unfolding one match at a time.

Most players spend their careers believing they are only playing the first. The best players in the world know they are playing all three — and have learned, through hard-won experience, which one to focus on at any given moment.

The Mental Game — The Battle No One Sees

Before the ball is ever struck, the mental game has already begun. It starts in the locker room, in the warm-up, in the very first glance across the net. A player is already narrating the match before it exists — telling themselves a story about who they are, what is possible today, what this opponent means, what this moment costs.

The mental game is not about positivity. It is not about repeating affirmations or pretending confidence you do not feel. It is about *management* — the disciplined, practiced ability to notice when your thoughts are pulling you away from the present point and bring yourself back before the damage is done. A player who can do this under pressure has a skill that no amount of physical talent can replace.

Between every point — in that small window of ten, fifteen, twenty seconds — the mental game is either won or lost. The player who uses that window to reset, to breathe, to refocus on what they can control, walks into the next point with a clean slate. The player who replays the last error, who argues with the linesperson in their head, who calculates how many games they need — that player walks into the next point already behind.

The score tells you where you are. The mind decides where you are going.

The Score Game — The Rules of the Present

The score game is the structure that holds everything else. Points become games. Games become sets. Sets become the match. It is a system of ruthless arithmetic — and yet, paradoxically, it is also a system that rewards the player who refuses to think about it too much.

The score game has a strange relationship with time. A player who is losing 0-5 in the third set is, technically, five games from defeat. But they are also only one game from 1-5. And then one game from 2-5. Tennis is built on the principle that each unit must be won individually — that you cannot carry momentum on credit, cannot borrow from tomorrow's confidence to pay today's debts. Each point begins at zero. Always.

This is both the cruelty and the mercy of the score game. It does not remember what happened three games ago. It does not care that you played brilliantly in the first set. The scoreboard is indifferent — and that indifference is, for the mentally strong player, a gift. It means the past cannot touch you unless you carry it there yourself.

The players who understand the score game at the deepest level are the ones who play *within* it rather than *against* it. They do not fight the fact that they are down a set. They do not negotiate with the mathematics. They simply play the next point as if it is the only point — because, in the only way that matters, it is.

You cannot win the match. You can only win this point. Then the next one. Then the one after that.

The Life Game — The Longest Set

Behind every player who steps onto the court, there is a life. A history. A set of experiences, losses, relationships, and choices that have nothing to do with tennis and everything to do with how that player competes. The life game is the longest game, the one that began long before the first rally and will continue long after the last one. And it shapes the mental game and the score game in ways that most players spend years not acknowledging.

A player who has learned resilience in life — who has been knocked down outside the lines and found a way to stand again — brings that knowledge onto the court. It lives in them as a kind of quiet certainty: *I have survived harder than this.* That sentence, unspoken, is worth more than any tactical

adjustment. It is the deep root that holds when the surface of a match turns to storm.

Conversely, a player who has never been taught to sit with discomfort — who has been rescued from difficulty, shielded from failure, protected from the honest consequences of error — will find the score game unbearable at its most critical moments. Not because they lack talent, but because they have no life game to draw from. The court has no mercy for an untested soul.

Tennis, at its highest expression, asks you to bring your whole self to the court. Your patience, your grief, your hunger, your history. Every loss you have absorbed and survived. Every moment you chose to continue when stopping would have been easier. The life game does not stay in the locker room. It walks out with you, racket in hand, and sits behind your eyes for every point you play.

How the Three Games Fit Inside Each Other

Think of them as three circles, each one containing the next. The life game is the outermost — vast, slow-moving, shaped over decades. Inside it sits the score game, the structured arena where today's match plays out across its tight geometry of lines and numbers. And at the center of everything, touching both the life game and the score game at every moment, is the mental game — the real-time intelligence that decides which resources to access and when.

When all three are aligned, a player enters what coaches call the zone and philosophers call flow and athletes simply call *right*. Everything feels inevitable. The ball is larger than it should be. Time moves strangely. The score becomes almost irrelevant because each point feels like its own complete universe, fully inhabited. This is not luck. This is the reward of having tended all three games — of having built a life worth drawing from, a mind worth trusting, and a relationship with the scoreboard that is honest but not fearful.

And when it falls apart — as it sometimes will, for every player at every level — the same three circles offer the map home. The score game reminds you: one point at a time. The mental game reminds you: reset, breathe, begin again. And the life game reminds you of the thing that matters most of all:

This match is not your whole life. But how you play it will teach you something about who you are — and who you are still becoming.

Walk onto the court knowing you are playing all three games. Honor each one. Let the life game give you depth. Let the score game give you structure. Let the mental game give you presence. And remember: the player who wins the mental game almost always wins the score game. And the player who wins both — over a lifetime of matches, across the long, beautiful arc of a playing career — discovers that tennis was always about the third game. The biggest one. The one that never dies.

Chapter 2 :The complete player

Growing in every dimension — body, mind, soul, technical , tactical

There is a moment every serious tennis player encounter, usually some time in their second or third year of real training, when they realize that the game is far larger than they first imagined. The strokes that felt so sophisticated at the beginning now feel like only the surface of something deep means growing in every direction at once. er and more demanding. They begin to understand — often through a difficult loss, or through watching someone who seems to do everything right — that tennis is not one skill but a constellation of them, and that growing as a player This chapter is about that realization, and what to do with it. It is about the f ive dimensions that every player must develop if they want to reach their potential: the body, the mind, the soul, the technical, and the tactical. These are not arbitrary categories invented by coaches to fill lesson plans. They are the actual architecture of the complete tennis player — the five

walls, as it were, of a structure that cannot stand if any one of them is allowed to crumble.

The Body — Your First Instrument Before you can think about a topspin forehand or a slice approach, before you can talk about patterns or game plans, you need a body that is ready for the demands of the sport. This sounds obvious, and yet it is the dimension most commonly neglected by recreational and developing players alike. It is easy to spend an hour hitting balls on the practice court and call it training. It is much harder — and much more necessary — to build the kind of physical foundation that al lows everything else to function. In tennis, your body must do contradictory things well. It must be explosive and yet enduring. It must generate enormous force in a fraction of a second, and then recover and do it again — fifty, sixty, eighty times in a single set. Your legs must carry you into position before your arm can do its work. Your core must stabilize every rotation. Your shoulders, wrists, and knees must absorb repetitive stress match after match, year after year, without breaking down. Physical development in tennis, therefore, is not simply about getting faster or stronger in isolation. It is about building a resilient, adaptable athletic body. It means training movement — split steps, lateral shuffles, the recovery sprint after a wide ball — not just running laps. It means building rotational power through the hips and torso, because that is where the energy for every shot originates. It means stretching and strengthening the small muscles around the joints that no injured. one pays attention to until they start to hurt. And crucially, it means learning to train consistently over months and years, not in furious bursts that leave you Neglect this dimension and the ceiling of your game will always be lower than it should be. Your technique may be beautiful in the warm-up, but when fatigue arrives in the third set, the body that has not been prepared will begin to fail, and the technique will go with it. Every other dimension of your development depends, at its foundation, on what you have built physically.

The Mind — Where Matches Are Really Decided Ask any experienced player where they have lost the most matches, and if they are honest, very

few will say it was because their technique broke down or their opponent was simply too fast. Most of the time, the answer lives somewhere between the ears. Tennis is a sport of relentless mental demand. Between each point, you stand alone. There is no teammate to encourage you, no coach , no referee resetting the atmosphere. There is only you, the score, and whatever is happening inside your head. Mental development in tennis begins with something deceptively simple: learning to focus on the right things. The player who is thinking about the last double fault while preparing to serve again has already lost something essential. The player who is calculating what will happen if they lose this game is not present in the point being played. Presence — the ability to be fully absorbed in the immediate task of hitting the next ball — is the foundational mental skill, and it takes years of deliberate practice to build reliably. But the mental game runs deeper than focus. It includes emotional regulation — the capacity to absorb a bad call, an unforced error at a critical moment, a streak of three games lost in a row, and return to the baseline not paralyzed or enraged but composed, even curious. It includes confidence that is not depen things go wrong. dent on the scoreboard. A player who believes in themselves only when winning is not mentally strong — they are mentally fragile in a way that is simply hidden when things go well. True mental strength is demonstrated precisely when perhaps most importantly, mental development means cultivating resilience — the deep capacity to begin again. Tennis gives you infinite opportunities to fail and infinite opportunities to recover. The score resets between games. A set can turn in four minutes. A match can shift on a single point. The players who understand this, who live by it rather than just reciting it, are the ones who are dangerous to play at any score.

The Soul — The Fire Beneath Everything This is the dimension least often discussed in coaching manuals, and it may be the most important of all. When we speak of the soul in tennis, we are speaking of the player's relationship with the game itself — the depth of their love for it, the authenticity of their reasons for competing, the quality of meaning they find in the struggle. Every player who has pushed through the genuinely

difficult parts of development — the long plateau where nothing seems to improve, the string of losses against the same opponent, the physical exhaustion of a pre-season training block, the loneliness of early mornings on empty courts — has done so because something inside them wanted it badly enough. That wanting is not just ambition. Ambition can be fragile; it fades when results do not come. What sustains the long journey is something quieter and more durable: a genuine love for the game, a curiosity about what you are capable of, a sense that the process of becoming a better tennis player is, in some way that matters to you, also the process of becoming more of who you want to be. Developing the soul dimension means spending time with the question of why you play. Not the surface answer — to win, to get a ranking, to be better than someone — but the real answer underneath that. It means cultivating gratitude for what the game gives you, even in its difficulty. It means competing for the right reasons, so that losing a match does not feel like a verdict on your sustain you through everything the game will ask of you. . It means, in the end, playing for something large enough to The players we remember most — the ones who moved us, who seemed to play with something extra — were not merely talented. They were lit from with in. Talent without soul produces competence. Soul transforms talent into devotion, and devotion, given enough time and the right conditions.

Technical — Learning to Speak the Language Technique is the language through which intention becomes action on a tennis court. When you decide to hit a heavy crosscourt forehand to push your opponent off the baseline, technique is the vocabulary that translates that idea into reality — or fails to. A player with sound technique has choices. A player without it is a prisoner of their own mechanics, limited to whatever their body happens to produce in the moment. Technical development in tennis is slower and more demanding than most beginners expect. The reason is that the strokes must be learned not merely to the point of competence, but to the point of automaticity — to the point where they function reliably under pressure, when you are tired, when the ball is com ing faster than you anticipated, when the game is on the line and your heart rate is elevated

and your mind is pulling in several directions at once. That level of reliability requires thousands of repetitions, not hundreds. But quantity of practice is not enough on its own. Technical development requires quality of attention. The player who hits two hundred forehands while thinking about something else is not building a reliable stroke — they are rehearsing whatever habit their body already has, good or bad. Deliberate technical practice means hitting with awareness: of the grip, the preparation, the con tact point, the swing path, the follow-through. It means being willing to slow down, to drill the uncomfortable parts, to work on weaknesses rather than endlessly reinforcing strengths. There is a particular kind of patience that technical development requires, and it is worth naming plainly. The early stages of learning a new technique of for the new pattern to take root.

Tactical — Chess at Full Sprint

Tactical intelligence is the ability to understand a match — to read your opponent, to recognize patterns, to construct points with a clear intention, and to adapt when the original plan is not working. It is, in essence, the capacity to think while competing. Tactical development begins with a simple but profound shift: from hitting the ball to playing the opponent. Young and developing players often evaluate their shots by asking, was that a good forehand? The tactically developing player asks, did that shot create the result I wanted? These are very different questions, and they lead to very different growth. A technically adequate shot placed precisely to a weakness is often worth more than a spectacular shot hit without intention. Learning tactics means learning to see the court — not just the ball, but the space, your opponent's position, their tendencies, the patterns that have already emerged in the match. It means building a library of patterns: serve and fore hand combinations, approach shot selections, ways to construct the short ball. And it means developing the judgment to know when to play aggressively and when to extend the rally, when to change what is not working and when to trust a plan that is correct even if it has not yet produced results.

Crucially, tactical intelligence only becomes available when the other dimensions are sufficiently developed. A player whose technique breaks down under pressure has no tactical options — they are simply trying to keep the ball in the court. A player whose mind is flooded with anxiety cannot read patterns or make adjustments. The tactical dimension depends on everything beneath it. It is, in a sense, the expression of everything the player has become. It would be convenient if these five dimensions could be developed in sequence — first the body, then the technique, then the tactics, and so on. But the honest truth is that they develop in parallel, each one influencing and being influenced by all the others. Physical fitness changes what is technically possible. Technical fluency opens tactical options. Mental strength allows the body to access its real capacity under pressure. The depth of your soul determines how far you will be willing to push in all the other areas. This means that the intelligent player does not obsess over one dimension at the expense of the others. It means developing the habit of honest self-assessment — looking at your game not only to find what is strong, but to find what is limiting you. More often than not, the ceiling of a player's game is not set by their best dimension but by their most neglected one. Think of the player who has beautiful technique but loses their nerve the moment the score gets tight. Or the one who is mentally ferocious but physically unable to sustain intensity through long matches. Or the one who trains endlessly but has never genuinely asked themselves why — and so finds, eventually, that the drive is hollow and the sacrifice feels pointless. In each case, the missing dimension is not a minor gap. It is the thing standing between where they are and where they could go. The invitation of this chapter — and of this entire book — is to take all five dimensions seriously. To train the body with the same intention you bring to practicing your serve. To work on the mind with the same discipline you bring to your footwork. To tend to the soul by staying connected to the love that brought you to this sport in the first place. To refine technique with patience and attention. And to think — really think — about the game you are playing and the player across the net.

Tennis will test you in all five dimensions. It always does. The question is only whether you will be ready.

Chapter 3: Namaste

THE LIGHT IN ME HONOURS THE LIGHT IN YOU

On the sacred exchange that takes place across a tennis net, and the opponent as your most honest teacher

In the ancient greeting of the Indian subcontinent, two people bring their palms together at the heart, bow gently toward one another, and say a single word: namaste. It is translated many ways, but at its deepest it means something like this — the divine in me recognises and bows to the divine in you. Not the roles you occupy, not the titles you hold, not what you have achieved or what you are worth by any external measure. The light in me sees the light in you. Two souls meeting across the ordinary business of a day and, for just a moment, acknowledging each other's depth.

It may seem a long way from a tennis court. It is not.

Every time two players shake hands across the net before a match, something is happening that is older and more significant than the competitive event about to take place. Two human beings are agreeing to meet each other fully — to bring everything they have and to ask the same of the person across the net — in an exchange that will, if both players are genuinely present for it, reveal things about both of them that ordinary life rarely uncovers. The net is not only a boundary. It is a threshold. And the person on the other side of it is not only an opponent. They are, in the deepest sense that sport makes possible, your partner in something.

The Opponent as Mirror

We do not tend to think of our opponents this way. We are taught to study them for weakness, to find what they cannot do and exploit it, to regard their discomfort as useful, their errors as welcome. And there is nothing

wrong with any of this — it is tennis, and competing to win is honest and right. But there is a layer beneath the tactical relationship that most players never stop to consider, because the culture of competition does not encourage it and the urgency of match play does not leave much room for reflection.

Your opponent is your mirror. Not a flattering one, and not a cruel one — but an honest one. They reveal to you, with extraordinary precision, exactly where you are in your development. Not where you wish you were. Not where your coach believes you might eventually arrive. Where you actually are, right now, under pressure, when it matters and when the points are real and no one can save you from the truth of the score. The player who beats you consistently has something your game has not yet found. The player you struggle against in style, even if you win, is showing you a version of tennis that your instincts have not yet learned to solve. The close match that goes the wrong way in the final game is telling you something specific about where your nerves and your tactics and your belief system currently stand.

This is not comfortable information. But it is the most useful information the game produces, and it comes entirely from the person across the net. Your opponent, simply by playing their best tennis against you, is doing you a service that no coach, no practice drill, no technical session can fully replicate. They are showing you the truth. And the player who receives that truth with something approaching gratitude — who can lose to someone and feel, underneath the disappointment, a genuine respect for what that loss has shown them — is a player who will grow faster and further than the one who turns away from the mirror in anger or excuse.

Every opponent I ever faced was, in some way, a teacher. The ones I lost to most painfully taught me the most. I just needed enough time, and enough humility, to understand what the lesson was.

What They Sacrifice to Be There

There is something else about your opponent that rarely receives its due acknowledgment, and it is simply this: they showed up. Whatever is happening in their life — and something is always happening, because life does not pause for tennis — they got up at whatever hour was required, packed their bag, made their way to the court, and chose to be there. They are carrying their own private weight of preparation and anxiety and hope. They want something from this match, just as you do. They are, beneath the competitive surface, a person trying — trying to be good at something, trying to prove something to themselves, trying to find out who they are when the pressure is real.

This is not a reason to go easy on them. Quite the opposite — the most respectful thing you can do for an opponent who has made that journey to the court is to compete against them with full seriousness, to give them the experience of facing everything you have, to make them earn every point. A player who holds back out of false modesty or social anxiety is not being kind to their opponent. They are denying them the real contest they came for. The namaste of tennis is not softness. It is the fierce and mutual recognition of two people who have agreed to test each other completely, and who honour that agreement by holding nothing back.

But it does mean something about how you carry yourself in relation to them. It means competing without contempt. It means that the player on the other side of the net is not a problem to be eliminated but a person to be met. Their errors are not occasions for your satisfaction. Their struggles are not something to feed off with a cold pleasure. You can be intensely competitive — you must be, if you are to honour the contest — while still holding, somewhere in your awareness, the recognition that the person you are competing against is doing the same difficult, vulnerable, courageous thing that you are doing. They stepped onto the court. So did you. In that, at least, you are the same.

The Handshake at the Net

The handshake at the end of a tennis match is one of the most quietly civilised customs in all of sport. Unlike team games, where the mutual

acknowledgment of opponents can be diffused across many bodies and a general momentum of collective feeling, the tennis handshake is individual and inescapable. You walk to the net alone. You meet the other person face to face. Whatever happened in the match — however it was played, whatever words were spoken or not spoken, whatever the score — there is a moment of direct human contact, and it asks something of both players.

Watch how players handle this moment and you will learn something about who they are that two sets of competitive tennis could not tell you. The player who offers the handshake with genuine warmth after a painful loss — not performed warmth, not the tight-lipped obligation of someone going through a motion, but real, open acknowledgment of the other person — is a player who has understood something important about why they play. They have understood that the result and the relationship are not the same thing. That losing to someone does not require diminishing them, or diminishing yourself. That the contest is over and what remains, when the score dissolves, is two people who gave each other something real.

And the player who receives a handshake after winning with genuine humility — not the self-congratulatory energy of someone who needed this more than they are willing to admit, but a real and quiet recognition of what the other person brought to the match — is also someone who has understood. They know that their victory was made possible by the quality of their opponent. That they played as well as they did partly because the person across the net demanded it of them. There is gratitude in that, if you are paying attention. The opponent made you better today. That is not a small thing.

The Sacred Ordinary

Namaste, carried onto a tennis court, does not mean playing with incense burning and thoughts of transcendence between every point. It is not a spiritual performance layered onto a competitive one. It is something more integrated and more practical than that. It is a way of seeing — a quality of attention that recognises, even in the middle of an intensely competitive

exchange, that what is happening between two players on a court is not entirely ordinary.

Two people have agreed to reveal themselves to each other through a game. They have agreed to be tested, to be pressured, to be found out by the score and the situation and the particular demands of the moment. They will both experience something real in the next hour — something that matters to them, that costs them something, that they will remember. They are, in the language of namaste, meeting each other. Not the social surfaces they present elsewhere, but something closer to the actual person underneath — the one who shows up under pressure, who responds to adversity or success, who plays their best or their worst and cannot entirely hide which is which.

That meeting is worth something. It is worth more, in many ways, than the score that records it. Players who have been competing for many years tend to remember the matches less clearly than the encounters — the opponent who pushed them further than they knew they could go, the rival whose game became the measuring stick for their own development over a decade, the stranger met in a draw who turned into a lasting friendship because something genuine was exchanged across that net. The score eventually fades. The encounter does not.

So bring your hands to your heart before you walk onto the court, even if only inwardly. Acknowledge the person waiting for you on the other side. Acknowledge that they are there, that they came, that they brought their whole complicated human self to this game, just as you have. Compete against them fully. Fight for every point. Give them nothing that is not earned. And underneath all of that intensity, carry a quiet recognition that the light in you and the light in them have agreed, today, to meet each other on this court, in this game, at this particular moment in both your lives.

That is namaste. And it makes the tennis, somehow, more than tennis

Chapter 4: Amor fati

Love *What Is*

On embracing everything the game gives you — the suffering, the failure, the slow and unglamorous path

Amor fati. Love of fate. Not merely accepting what happens to you. Not tolerating it, or making peace with it through gritted teeth, or telling yourself that everything happens for a reason as a way of managing the pain. Something more radical than any of that. Nietzsche meant the full and genuine embrace of everything that is — the beautiful and the brutal, the triumph and the humiliation, the injury and the recovery, the years of grinding progress and the single afternoon that undoes it all. He meant looking at your life, with all its difficulty and all its failure and all the ways it has refused to go the way you planned, and choosing to love it as it is rather than as you wish it were.

This is not a comfortable idea. It was not meant to be. It is, in fact, one of the most demanding things a person can genuinely attempt. But for a tennis player — for anyone who has decided to pursue something difficult over a long period of time, through setbacks and plateaus and the thousand small defeats that the game quietly accumulates — it may be the most important idea of all.

What the Game Will Give You

If you stay in tennis long enough, and most serious players do stay longer than they originally intended to, the game will give you everything. It will give you mornings when the ball feels like it is on a string attached to your racket, when every shot lands exactly where you wanted it and the game feels effortless and you wonder why you ever found any of this difficult. And it will give you the other mornings — the ones where nothing works, where shots you have hit ten thousand times go inexplicably wrong, where your body feels foreign to you, where the game you thought you owned seems to belong to someone else entirely.

It will give you victories that feel larger than themselves, that carry meaning well beyond the match, that you will remember clearly decades later. And it will give you losses — losses to opponents you should have beaten, losses in finals you spent months preparing for, losses at moments when the cost of losing was high enough to hurt for a long time. It will give you the particular grief of an injury arriving at the worst possible time, when your game was finally where you had been working to bring it. It will give you the slow indignity of returning from that injury to find that the game has moved on without you and the work must be done again, largely from the beginning.

It will give you plateaus so long and featureless that you will wonder whether you have stopped improving altogether, whether the effort is producing anything at all, whether some invisible ceiling has been reached and there is simply no more available to you. It will give you coaches who do not understand you, tournament draws that seem designed to be unkind, surfaces that expose every weakness in your game, opponents who play in a style that you find impossible to find a rhythm against. The game, over a career, is extraordinarily comprehensive in its catalogue of challenges. It withholds very little.

The question is not whether these things will happen. They will. The question is what relationship you will have with them when they do.

The Player Who Fights What Is

Most of us, by default, fight what is. This is an understandable impulse — almost everything in our culture encourages it. We are told to push back against adversity, to refuse to accept limitations, to overcome obstacles through sheer force of will. And there is real value in that spirit when it is directed at the right things. But when it is directed at reality itself — at the facts of a situation that cannot be changed — it becomes one of the most exhausting and fruitless activities available to a human being.

Watch a player who is at war with their circumstances and you can feel the cost of it from across the court. The player who cannot accept the bad

bounce, who is still internally arguing with the net cord from two points ago while the next point is being played. The player who is furious at the weather — the wind, the sun, the heavy air — as though their anger might change it. The player who walks onto the court against a pushing, lobbing, moonballing opponent and spends the entire match resenting the style of play rather than solving it. All of that energy — the frustration, the resistance, the low-grade argument with reality — is energy that cannot go into the tennis. And you can see it in the way they play. The strokes tighten. The movement becomes fractured. The decisions become reactive rather than intentional. They are not really playing tennis anymore. They are playing a different game entirely, one where the main opponent is not the person across the net but the facts of the situation around them.

The tragedy is that none of the things they are fighting can be changed by fighting them. The bounce already happened. The wind is not responsive to complaint. The opponent across the net is not going to change their style because it is found irritating. What can be changed — the next point, the next game, the tactical response to what is in front of them — is precisely what their resistance is preventing them from accessing. They are locked in combat with the past and the fixed, and the present, where everything real remains available, slips by unattended.

Loving the Difficulty

Amor fati does not ask you to pretend that the difficult things are not difficult. It does not require you to manufacture a false cheerfulness about an injury, or to smile at a loss that genuinely hurts, or to claim that the plateau you have been stuck on for four months is secretly a gift. The love it asks for is not a denial of reality. It is something harder and more honest than that.

It asks you to look at the difficulty — to really see it, without minimizing it or dramatizing it — and to recognize that it is part of the same thing you love. The hard match on a slow clay court in the wind against an opponent who retrieves everything is not a deviation from the tennis experience. It is the tennis experience. The long and uncomfortable process of rebuilding a

stroke that has developed a flaw is not an interruption to your development as a player. It is your development as a player. The loss that exposes a weakness you did not know you had is not a verdict. It is information — the most valuable kind, the kind that cannot be obtained any other way.

The player who has genuinely internalized amor fati does not merely cope with these things. They receive them. There is a difference, and it is felt clearly by anyone who has experienced both states. Coping implies burden — a weight being managed, carried, endured. Receiving implies openness — a willingness to let what is happening actually happen, to allow it to mean something, to let it do whatever work it is capable of doing on you as a player and as a person. The receiving player, paradoxically, suffers less than the coping player. Not because their circumstances are better, but because they are not adding the suffering of resistance to the suffering of the difficulty itself.

Every Match You Were Given

Think back across your history with this game. Think of the matches you would erase if you could — the ones that hurt, the ones you are not proud of, the ones you lost in ways that felt embarrassing or unjust or simply deflating. Now consider what those matches gave you, not in the consoling sense of a lesson neatly drawn, but in the actual, practical sense of what followed from them. The humiliating loss that finally made you take your fitness seriously. The tight defeat that revealed, for the first time, how your decision-making deteriorates under pressure. The match you won but played badly, which showed you that winning was not sufficient — that you cared about something beyond the result.

None of those things would exist without the match that gave them. The growth was inseparable from the experience. And if you could genuinely go back and remove the difficult match, you would also remove what it produced — the version of yourself that emerged from the other side of it. This is the central insight of amor fati as it applies to sport: you cannot love the player you are becoming while hating the experiences that are making you that player. They are the same thing. The path and the

destination are not separate. The suffering and the growth are not cause and effect standing apart from each other. They are woven from the same thread.

To love your fate as a tennis player is to love the entire map — not just the pleasant territories, the easy victories, the days when everything flows. It is to love the difficult matches, the seasons of struggle, the hours of practice that felt like wasted effort and were quietly building something you could not yet see. It is to love the version of the game that showed up today, even if it is not the version you wanted. It is to arrive at the court with a genuine willingness for whatever is about to happen, because you have understood — really understood, in your body and not just in your head — that everything the game gives you is part of what the game is.

The Choice Made Again and Again

Amor fati is not a permanent state of arrival. It is not a place you reach and then inhabit serenely for the rest of your tennis life. It is a choice, and it is a choice that must be made again and again — in the middle of the tight third set, in the moment the injury is confirmed, in the first week back on court after a long absence when everything feels wrong and the gap between where you are and where you were is painfully visible. The choice is simply this: will I spend this moment fighting what is, or will I be fully present to it?

The player who chooses presence — not once but habitually, not in ideal conditions but in every condition — becomes, over time, remarkably difficult to defeat. Not because they are more talented, necessarily, or more tactically sophisticated, but because they are entirely available to the match in front of them. Nothing is being held back in resistance. Nothing is being spent on the argument with circumstances. There is just the game, and the player, and the full commitment of everything they have to the reality of this moment.

That is what amor fati looks like on a tennis court. It looks like a player who welcomes the wind because the wind is part of today's match and

today's match is what they came here to play. It looks like a player who steps up to serve at 5–6 in the third with something that is not quite fearlessness — because the nerves are real and they feel them — but is something better: a willingness to be exactly where they are, to need nothing to be different, to let the moment be large and meet it as it is.

Love what is. Love the match you were given, not the match you wanted. Love the player you are today, not the player you imagine you should be by now. Love the long path, the honest difficulty, the whole unglamorous truth of what it takes to grow inside this game. That love — not the sentimental kind, but the fierce and unflinching kind — is one of the most powerful things a tennis player can ever develop. And unlike a forehand or a serve, no one can take it from you when the pressure arrives

Chapter 5:Gratitude

The *Gift* of the Court

On gratitude — not as a sentiment, but as the deepest way of seeing what we have been give

Somewhere in the world right now, a player is sitting on the edge of a hospital bed wishing they could be on a tennis court. They are not thinking about their ranking or their backhand or the opponent who gave them trouble last season. They are thinking about the simple and enormous fact of being able to move — to run, to reach, to strike a ball with a racket and feel the court underneath their feet. The injury took all of that away, and now that it is gone they understand, with a clarity that perfect health never quite produces, what they had. They would give almost anything to be back on that court, even just for an hour, even just to rally without a purpose, even in the rain on a surface they never particularly liked. They would be grateful in a way they were never quite able to be when they still had it.

Most of us do not require the loss to learn the lesson. But most of us, if we are honest, require something close to it. We require the long injury, or the

forced absence, or the move to a new city where there are no courts, or simply the accumulation of years that begins to make the body feel less permanent, less reliably available than it once seemed. Something has to make the gift visible, because gifts, while we still hold them easily in our hands, tend to become invisible. We stop seeing them. We start taking them for granted, which is another way of saying we start treating them as though they were owed to us, as though the court and the body and the time to play were things we are simply entitled to have.

Gratitude — real gratitude, the kind that changes how you stand on a court and how you move through a match — is the antidote to that blindness. Not gratitude as a platitude, not the performed thankfulness of someone who knows they are supposed to feel fortunate. Something much more concrete than that. The genuine recognition that what you have access to, right now, today, is not guaranteed, is not permanent, is not owed to you by the universe — and is, in its quiet way, extraordinary.

The Ordinary Miracle

Consider what is required for you to play a single hour of tennis. A body that works — joints that bend and bear weight, muscles that fire on demand, a cardiovascular system that rises to the effort and recovers from it, eyes that track a moving ball at speed, a nervous system that coordinates everything in fractions of a second without conscious instruction. All of this, running continuously, mostly without your awareness or your gratitude, a staggering architecture of biological machinery that took millions of years of evolution to produce and that you inherited, largely for free, at birth.

Consider also the court itself — someone built it, someone maintains it, someone pays for the lights if you play under them. Consider the racket in your hand, the product of engineering and manufacturing and a supply chain stretching across continents. Consider the time — the hours carved out of a life, which is itself a finite and non-renewable resource, and the fact that there are enough of those hours available to you that you can spend some of them playing a game. Consider the opponent or the practice

partner across the net — another person, with their own complicated life, who also chose to be here, who also gave up some of their irreplaceable time to come and play this game with you. All of it, taken together, is not ordinary at all. It only looks ordinary because it is familiar.

The great spiritual traditions have always pointed at this same thing — the way familiarity dulls perception, the way human beings are extraordinarily skilled at adapting to their good fortune until it disappears from view. We stop tasting the food that nourishes us. We stop hearing the music we love. And we stop feeling the privilege of a body on a court, a racket in our hand, a ball rising toward us and the whole wide game spread out in front of us, waiting. It does not take wisdom to feel this. It takes only a moment of genuine attention. But that moment of attention must be chosen, again and again, because the habit of taking things for granted is strong and patient, and it will return the moment we stop choosing against it.

What Gratitude Does to a Tennis Player

It would be easy to dismiss gratitude as a soft idea — something for journals and meditation retreats, with limited application to the competitive intensity of tennis. But this dismissal misunderstands what gratitude actually does to a player, and it misunderstands where competitive intensity really comes from.

The player who is genuinely grateful to be on the court plays with a quality that is difficult to describe but immediately recognizable when you see it. There is a freedom in their movement that is not quite explainable by their physical ability alone. There is a willingness — to try the difficult shot, to chase the ball that looks unreachable, to stay in the uncomfortable rally rather than forcing a low-percentage conclusion — that comes not from fearlessness but from a kind of abundance. They are not protecting something. They are spending something. And they are spending it freely because, at some level beneath conscious thought, they understand that this time on the court is a gift rather than a right, and that gifts are meant to be used fully.

Contrast this with the player who has lost touch with gratitude — who arrives at the court already slightly resentful of what is demanded of them, who practices with the begrudging efficiency of someone doing an obligation, who competes with the tightly clenched intensity of someone who feels that they are owed a certain outcome and is furious, at some background level, that the game has not yet delivered it. This player is not fully present on the court. Part of them is somewhere else — in the past, nursing grievances, or in the future, calculating what they need. The part of them that is actually playing tennis is operating at a fraction of what becomes available when you are simply, wholly, glad to be there.

Gratitude also fundamentally changes a player's relationship with difficulty. The hard match, the brutal training session, the long plateau of no apparent improvement — all of these feel different when they are held inside an appreciation for the fact of getting to do this at all. The struggle is still real. The difficulty is not minimized. But it sits in a different context. The player who knows, bone-deep, that the chance to play is not guaranteed — that bodies fail, that time runs out, that the court will not always be available — tends to approach even the hardest sessions with something the ungrateful player rarely finds: a willingness to be fully there for whatever the game asks of them.

The Players Who Cannot Play

Think for a moment about the people who would trade places with you without a second's hesitation. The former player whose body gave out too early, who watched their last match without knowing it was their last, and who has spent years since then carrying the particular ache of an unfinished love. The young player in a place where courts are scarce and equipment is expensive and the chance to develop is simply not available, despite a talent that might, in different circumstances, have become something remarkable. The aging player who still wants to play but whose joints have finally said no, who sits now in a chair watching matches on a screen with the specific hunger of someone who knows exactly what is happening on that court and would give a great deal to be inside it again.