

Preparation, discipline keys to on-court success

If you've seen it once, you've seen it 100 times: The professional athlete, a baseball pitcher, or a quarterback, or perhaps a racketball player, is surrounded by the press after a tournament.

"What happened?" goes the questioning in the first frustrating review of a poor performance.

"I don't know," is the reply. "I just didn't seem to have it today."

Exactly what is "it"? Not ability. Most professional athletes — and amateur ones that take their sports seriously — are in good to excellent shape. And you can say the same thing for fundamentals which, by now, have long been mastered.

IN MY MIND, what separates the best from the rest in any tournament revolves around a trio of words: preparation, adaptation and discipline.

No matter what the sport, you just can't walk on a playing surface without paying a price to be sooner or later, it'll catch up with you.

Paying a price relates first — and perhaps best — to tournament preparation. People ask how my Eksteen teammate, Dave Peck, and myself can look like we're in a trance on the court. It's easy, in a way. For months, weeks, years before that match, I've been taking one continual test. My workouts have been intense. I hit the shots where they belong, and I work to get in the proper position to hit them.

And because in tournaments you'll play people you've never met, I vary my practice opponents. Obviously, it's not to my — or your — advantage to play a person who has the same strengths and weaknesses day-in and day-out (not to mention the boredom factor).

PLAY QUICK players, accurate ones, retrievers, powermen — all styles. It adds and strengthens your game, forces you to test shots you don't normally test. You can always go back to your bread and butter if need be.

Now that you've prepared to play the



racquetball
Mike Yellen

match with intense, well-planned practices, what happens when you hit the court for real? This is where adaptation comes in.

In racketball, you control your own destiny. It differs from a batter in baseball, who can control only himself. If a pitcher is having a hot day, the opposing batter is in trouble.

It's different in racketball. Your opponent hits a shot you can return with a kill. At least you have a chance to respond. That's why you have to analyze what's going on around you, anticipate and adjust.

TO ME, the hard drive serve is the toughest to return. On certain days, I've faced the ball into the backhand corner, only to have some guy roll it out. Even though it's a popular serve, you have to analyze your actions.

Do I go to a half-lobe, even though it's not as effective offensively? Do I slip in a Z-serve?

The key is, whatever a person does well, you want to take away from him. Pretty simple, huh? You'd be surprised how many times I see professionals and amateurs alike beaten because they refuse to change their "style."

For me, if the opponent can roll them out off the back wall, I don't hit back-wall shots. If he kills when he gets set, I keep him moving. Do the same thing. Analyze what your opponent likes to do, then drive hard in the opposite direction.

OF COURSE, it changes every time you walk on the court. You have to be your own self-analyst. Make your opponent do what he doesn't want to do.

Finally, the key to any climb to excellence — or consistency — is discipline. All the good professional players have it. The ones that are struggling to win don't.

If you have a problem with your backhand, get proper instruction then practice the shot. Don't rally. Just get yourself a court, set up, drop the ball and swing for an hour, or until you feel comfortable and confident with the shot.

So many people say they can't hit this or that shot, then the first thing they do when they practice is blast

away at their best shot for hours on end. What good does that do?

YOU KNOW how to hit, say, a forehand. But what about a ceiling shot, or a Z serve or pinch volley? I realize this is a course in simplicity. With four walls, a ceiling, a racket and a ball, racketball is not that difficult to define. The key is refining.

Almost any athlete worth his salt will tell you the mental aspect of sports makes and breaks careers. It's the same on any level. You have to take that little extra step to improve. That means taking the time to be prepared now.

It will save you from answering a lot of "What happened?" questions later on.

Mike Yellen, a Southfield native, is among the top professional racketball players in the world. His advice column will appear periodically in the *Observer & Eccentric* sports pages.

It's time to think about summer bowling leagues

The league year is drawing to a quick end. Some teams are scurrying for positions, while others are securing a comfortable lead.

But, any dedicated bowler is thinking about one thing... summer leagues.

Al yes, summer leagues. Those wonderful day and evening leagues that seem to be more fun than competition.

The city of Farmington offers a lot of different leagues at different hours. **AT DRAKESHIRE** Lanes, summer

leagues start around May 16.

The ladies will take to the lanes Monday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings at 7:30, and also at 10 a.m. Wednesday and 12:30 p.m. Tuesday. The Tuesday afternoon league includes lunch.

The men get the lanes Monday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings at 7:30.

On Monday, Drakeshire will have a beginning mixed league in the evening. But, instead of the usual money earn-



bowling
Red Poulin

ings at summer's end, everyone will receive a bowling ball.

The kids can bowl with their parents

on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, or they can assemble with their friends and bowl Tuesday afternoons at 4:00.

AT COUNTY Lanes, all evening leagues start at 8 p.m. The two most popular leagues are happening on Monday and Wednesday nights.

On Monday, the men form a trio league, bowling four games across three pairs of lanes. Wednesday is ladies night with four on a team.

WEDNESDAY IS also ladies day at Bel Aire Lanes. The men can bowl on Mondays in a trio league, bowling four games over two pairs of lanes.

Mixed leagues are Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday evenings, while the kids can get into action with the adults on Wednesday. All evening leagues start at 8, with the exception of the family twosome which starts at 6:30.

AT WEST BLOOMFIELD Lanes, there will be a mixed league 8 p.m. on Fridays. The men's trio is Mondays, with a \$600 first-place payoff. The women get the lanes Wednesday night.

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