

Hocus Pocus Mental Focus

By: Yvonne Profit 3/15/2010



Mary had four matches over the weekend. She won her first match 6-0, 6-2. She prevailed in her second match with a score of 6-1, 6-2. The excitement and anticipation of the third match was high. Mary's next opponent was seeded #2. Jollie (not her real name of course) had played Mary before and had won; her confidence was definitely intact. Mary knew it would be a highly pressurized match! She had been working on her mental toughness and knew from the Farris Dobbs' match, she had to be mentally prepared for just about anything. She knew no matter what, she had to maintain her mental focus, and not become unnerved by anything her opponent said or did. When I saw the size difference between Mary and Jollie it was quite noticeable in the height department. It was quite apparent, once Mary grows into her body; she's going to be a force to be reckoned with.

They began the match and Mary was obviously undaunted by her opponent's high ranked and high seed in the 12s age division. The mental games were about to begin. Jollie left constantly to get a referee. She summoned a referee so often, that he refused to come to the court. It was interesting to note, the referee corrected Jollie on a previous call when he refused to come to the court. She left on another occasion, crying profusely camouflaged by her dark sun glasses. I overheard her telling the referee, "Mary is calling balls out that are in this much!" Her hand measurements were approximately two feet wide! The referee listened attentively, and they returned to the court once again. I shook my head not in disbelief, because I have come to expect anything in this ferociously

competitive, win-at-all-cost junior sport. Mary was not deterred the slightest by Jollie's fruitless attempts to break her mental focus. Every time Jollie left the court, Mary stood there confidently with her hands folded across her racquet. She waited patiently for her to return to resume her mission, her mission of maintaining control, showing patience, demonstrating resolve. I envisioned her saying to herself, "Today is *not* the day. I will not succumb to these tactics. I will let my racquet do the talking." Oh, how I've said that so many times to both of my girls. Like the Yellow Pages' ad says, "Let your fingers do the walking." In tennis I say, "Let your racquet do the talking. Let your racquet do the stinging, and walk off the court singing!" Hey, nice little rhyme. Or like the smooth as silk former heavyweight champion of the world, Muhammad Ali in his hay day said, "Float like a butterfly sting like a bee." I'm going to kick your butt so all can see! Well, I added that last line. Two hours later, Mary prevailed, 6-2, 6-4. Wow!

What a match in mental toughness! I can see why people say, tennis is 80% mental and 20% physical.

Mary's next opponent was the #6 seed Sabrina (Not her real name either). Sabrina realized quickly Mary loved to hit a ball with pace, so she shot those suckers to Mississippi! They would go so high in the air, that when I blinked, I didn't see the ball anymore! She too was incredibly referee friendly, and summoned him/her on numerous occasions. She also requested them so often, they would not come anymore. This prompted her to head to the tournament desk and one of the guys would come to stand guard. Seemingly after every call made by Mary, she would look in the direction of the referee for confirmation, and he would agree with Mary's call, to the chagrin of Sabrina. Sabrina fought hard, but it was quite apparent she was losing momentum. Honestly, I thought there was some method to her madness of constantly leaving to get a referee. One could conclude these were mini-breaks! This was better than running all over the court like a chicken with your head cut off. I know that chicken got tired too, and once he realized he didn't have a head, he fell right over. Well, thank goodness Sabrina, still had her head, but she was going down like the Titanic. Sabrina won the first set 4-6. Mary won the second set 6-2, and third set 6-2. Their match lasted for three hours. What a day!

I would now like to take a moment to thank Jollie, Sabrina and Farris for testing Mary's mental toughness. They left the court so many times to get a referee, I actually lost

count. These three girls accomplished what we never would have been able to duplicate in her practice; actual lessons in guerilla junior tennis warfare! Yes, this is a war for ranking point and prestige. Mary was steadily tested and passed with flying colors. I thank you both for making her that much stronger in mental resilience! Now thanks to you guys, she believes she *can* win and will continue to build on this confidence in her ability. She now has the self-assurance of knowing she can get better, and that she can *do* better. It's not about the win, even though it is definitely gratifying, knowing that she knows she can do this. She realized no matter what anyone says, about her or no matter what they may think about her, what matters most is what Mary thinks of herself. I can guarantee you her self-esteem is totally intact. Sticks and stones may break her bones but words will never hurt her. The actions of others on the tennis court will never hurt her. She has been taught well. The only object coming across the tennis net is the ball, nothing else matters. The mental maneuvers and posturing to gain the court advantage by her opponents is of miniscule significance. Nothing matters but keeping her eye on the ball and playing the ball. She eternalized those words and was successful in her endeavors. Young ladies, thank you, I wouldn't have been able to teach what she has learned today in a million years; Mary experiencing it firsthand did that for me. Whoever said experience is the best teacher is absolutely right! Hocus pocus mental focus! Mary won and wow they were all stunned!