

The 80% — 20 % Match Reality

Four parts between points — so Thursday's practice can show up on Saturday's match

On average, about 80% of a match you are not hitting a tennis ball. You are walking, breathing, and talking to yourself.

Only 20% of the time on court are we playing points.

That is where the gap lives. When you pro-level manage the 80% ... you tend to bring out your best tennis point after point.

When you get sloppy with the 80%, this happens ...

Play one or two points at the top of your skill level, then dwell below it for the next three minutes, and confidence leaks.

The scoreboard moves into your head between points. The grip gets tight before the next toss.

Manage the 80% really well, and the 20% that is actual tennis tends to look like relaxed confident practice.

This is not a lucky ritual. It is not a laminated card that saves you. The card is a reminder.

The floor is still First Victory — the same words, 3x a day, especially the night before a posted match. Between points is how that floor shows up *during* the match.

Four parts. Every point. Including the ones that “don’t matter.”

1. Reset the emotion

Even keel. No spike.

You hit the running forehand of the year — don't throw a parade.
You miss the wide open court sit-down volley — don't hold a funeral.

The brain on a rollercoaster decides you are not to be trusted.

Immediately go to a word, a phrase, a song hook — whatever breaks the high and the low. Then you're cleaning the slate for Part 2.

2. Recover the body

Three or four nasal breaths from the abs. Even after a double fault. The routine stays the routine or it won't be there at 4-all.

3. Decide how the next point starts

Not *how do I win this point*.

Not the 3–4 score that doesn't exist yet.

Not “don't choke, this is huge.”

How do I *start*.

Serve: wide, body, or T — against *this* guy.

Return, first serve: default, heavy middle, take it from there.

Return, second serve: one plan *if* you get the look you've already seen.

No result-hoping. Clarity about the start. That's the smart ball. That's perty, not the highlight.

4. Here we go

Not a speech about winning. Confidence about the start you just chose.

Here we go.

Then play.

If you only pull this out when it's a “big point,” you will forget part one. Discipline is every point and the changeover. Ninety seconds is enough to read the four lines. Twenty-five seconds is enough to run them. *Let's roll.*