

HAWAII USTA Kona Kupuna Team - 2026 Playoffs

We're fully committed to bringing out our best tennis point after point and throughout all of our matches. We can do that without putting pressure on ourselves to have to perform.

When we do that ... the scoreboard will take care of itself.

The league tennis arena creates more perceived pressure than in practice or even a tournament match.

How we perceive pressure can a tangible response (individually, as partners, and as a team) that we can choose to think of it any way we want. We have free will.

You guys are solid experienced doubles players. You already know how to play the game. We don't need to fix stroke technique. We simply need to know how to ... *trust*.

The top players in any skill level and/or age group are the ones who can control their thinking and their emotions so that they give themselves the best chance to bring out their best tennis in the next point ... even when the match gets really close.

There are going to be times in matches when the scoreboard wants to shout out loud and influence that perception of pressure.

But for us it won't. We could feel ... *"This is right now a BIG point. Can't mess this up."*

Instead, we'll trust we're going to choose calm clarity for how to start the next point over perceived panicked pressure.

Next point clarity mindset means ... that's literally our focus. Not future scoreboard hoping or fearing. Instead, it's ... an agreement between you and your partner. How do we tactically want to start the next point?

It's not needing to plan out the end result of the point ... because we ultimately don't have complete control over it.

But we can have a tactical focus on how to start. The reality is this ...

Those guys over there are good, so they'll likely return our shot. And that's OK.

If they do return it, *we'll just take it from there*.

When that's your level of confidence, you make smart choices as the point develops without feeling rushed, panicked, and looking for the exit.

When you guys ALL feel you can play this way, you put yourself into a winning position.

When you release **the need for** either a certain winning outcome or the fear of an outcome you don't want ... that's when you individually and as a partnership consistently bring out your best stuff.

And that's the ultimate goal ... how to bring out your best stuff.

It's never a guarantee, but it definitely gives you the best chance to get the eventual outcome you want.

This is not a lecture about mental toughness.

This is our shared agreement about what we do with any extra perceived stress that team playoffs bring — teammates watching, a partner depending on you, Hawaii on the shirt, a result that lives on a scoreboard.

We do not pretend it isn't there. We expect it. We let them deal with it.

Instead, we use the same routine after every point so pressure does not run us into looking for the fire escape once the point starts.

Practice this routine until it is boring. Boring in practice is what holds up at 5–5 in the 3rd set TB.

The 80/20 Reality — Most of our match time (80%) is spent between points. Points last several seconds.

So, when we manage that 80% of the match really well, we tend to play the next point at the top of our skill level.

When we get sloppy with our between points and side change times, our brains take us to places we don't want to go to.

Since we're going to lose some points, make some errors, etc., if we then show emotions after those points, it's easy to think about the next point as ... "Don't screw this one up too".

Or one partner to another ... "This next point is really important, so we gotta win it."

That stuff inflates the point, aims at avoidance, and dumps the load on your partner.

Both of you start protecting a result instead of playing a smart first shot choice and a pattern that's been working.

We pro-level shake off any mistake and agree on how to start the next point..

After a partner misses a shot — it now becomes a team fix.

If you missed, do not give the other team icing on the cake: no shoulder slump, no hands on hips, no angry words, no stare at the spot.

1. Relax your face and soften your eyes with a calm exhale. Quiet out-breath, like fogging a mirror without sound. No theatrical smile. No sigh they can hear across the net. It could be a reminder or cue for the next time you play that shot such as ... Higher or more inside the sideline or _____. It's not a stroke technique correction. It's simply a reminder of what you intend to do next time.
2. Then a step toward your partner. Low open-palm touch. Partnership confirmation, not celebration. Low and quiet. Soften first, then partnership touch. If the face is still tight, the palm is slightly pissed.
3. "We're good. Serve to the body?" Not a feelings check. Instead, it's a suggested call with an easy off-ramp. Partner confirms or names the one change: "Yes." or "I'm going out wide." One question. One answer. If he says nothing, the suggested serve stands. No third sentence.
4. Walk with First Victory certainty about how you two are starting the next point. After the call, the conversation is over. The walk sells the plan to your own body: same pace, head up, no leftover argument in the shoulders. You are not hoping the idea was good. You are going to run it with clarity and conviction.

If it was his miss: do not freeze and stare, and do not put hands on hips at him. Match his walk. Palm. Plan. You guys are a solid team.

Also use a short version after an outright winner. No need for an ear splitting 'COME ON!'. Same pro-level open palm. Same short next point question. Same decided walk.

After the point is over, no matter what the result was, somatic (body language) cues start the mental reset. Practice it like crazy. It's a game changer.

Zinsser's *First Victory* Happens Before The Match

Nate Zinsser, from Sun Tzu: victorious people win first, then go into battle. Losing people go into battle and hope. First Victory is a sense of certainty about what you can do, so the body can play without fighting the tennis ball.

For us it means: we two have already decided how this point starts. The walk is not hope. It is the decision as we leave the huddle.

It is not “we’re going to win the match.” It is “we know the next job, and we are going to run it.” Hope or fear is the opposite of First Victory.

It happens in practice, the night before the match, an hour before the match, during the warmup, throughout the match.

It is a clear self-talk message that builds certainty about your abilities to compete fully with shot choice clarity ... no matter what the scoreboard says.

Changeovers are where old points try to rewrite the story. Use five seconds of partner time before any tactical chat. Palm or racquet tap. One speaks. The other confirms.

Script: “We’re good. Let’s go to work.”

Between points — your 5-second version.

Keep winning your personal First Victory.

Why we practice this. And we do deliberately practice this.

Nothing here works if it only appears on playoff day. We train the gap between points the same way we train a volley.

This isn’t a light switch you can turn on during a tight match whenever you remember you better do it.

Like acting, this requires lots of rehearsing during practice. Don’t waste that time when you’ve got 20 seconds as you’re picking up balls in practice.

Rehearse your First Victory 3x a day. Morning. During practice. At night before bed.

Be sure to download the 14-Day Install PDF - click. Your First Victory script is in there. Print it out. Copy / paste to your phone. Set 3 reminders.

Get out there and take care of business gents. Let’s roll ... *Brent*