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## Context to the nugget conversation

Chris speaks about the fact that players often have 60-70% of match-time when they are not playing a point where they have to channel their focus and attention. He speaks about how Roger managed these periods of time.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And in that context, you also say tennis is a sport where there is a lot of downtime between rallies, rallies are only about 30 odd percent of the total time spent on the court and more than half the time is spent in the head. If we talk about match situations, do you have an insight into how Roger manages the time when he is not playing a point?

Christopher Clarey (CC): Well, it is actually much more than half the time, you think about it. It depends how long your points last. If you are a baseline grinder, maybe so, but if you are trying to do it in two or three shots like Roger often did, it is a lot of time to walk around. And Christian Marcolli, the psychologist he worked with him when he was young, that was his observations, what is the most challenging thing about tennis because Christian has worked like many sports psychologists in many different sports and he goes, that is the hard thing, is that there is so much time between points to mess yourself up, to think about things that can trouble you, and it really is for him about controlling a tennis player's time management and thought management during that period. I do not know precisely what Roger did all through his career but I know in those early years, they worked on things like where your eyes are during a match between points because with a crowd there and point on the other side of the net and chair umpire and maybe family and friends, it is easy to let your eyes wander to other parts of the court and get distracted, and Roger often would kind of go off the boil for long periods of time in matches that he was dominating in his career. I know that he and Christian worked on trying to keep his focus on the strengths, on the area just around him to keep himself in that bubble. And a lot of Roger's work, I am sure, in the mental game was focused on trying to keep himself contained because as an extrovert, gregarious person, he is easily distracted and easily drawn to the wider community in his tennis matches, and he was able to learn to channel that and keep his focus really on the ball in play and the point at hand.

DJ: True. I mean, back to the earlier point you said, if you are curious as a person, then your natural instinct is to absorb what is going on around you and to contain that and to really stay in that bubble, as you say, either between points or when you are sitting under the empire every two games, and keeping your attention, it can be quite challenging in a match.

CC: Yeah, and thinking about best of five sets, you are playing three to four hours, almost five hours sometimes, it is a long, long time to be sitting in your school chair trying to do your homework there.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It is fascinating to see how players manage idle time between when they are actually playing. Even in a sport like cricket, if one looks at percentage of time when a batsman is active, it is possibly even smaller than tennis. How the batsman manages his inner voice becomes all the more critical especially when there is sledging going on.

Back to tennis, it is interesting how Roger dealt with this phenomenon. Another element that could help in these situations is rituals. Ethan Kross (EK), author of the book – Chatter which is all about handling the inner voice, speaks about how Rafael Nadal would handle the same issue.

*EK: "I asked him what was the hardest thing he struggled with on the tennis court? And his answer surprised a lot of people because he didn't say the hardest thing, he struggled with was maintaining his endurance or returning his opponent's backhand, it was managing the voice inside his head. It was the mind game that was the most difficult component for him. And if you have ever watched him play you actually know what he does to manage that chatter. Nadal is famous for engaging in elaborate rituals. So, from the time he walks on to the court, how he carries his bag and walks to his bench to the way he positions his water bottles, to the routines he engages in before every single serve, he's highly ritualistic and when asked why he does that, he has said and something to the effect of I order my surroundings to match the order I seek in my head."*

DJ: If this topic is of interest, do look up my conversation with Ethan Kross for a deeper dive into how we can handle the inner voice. You can go to [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com) and find him in the guest section.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Ethan Kross that is referenced: [Rafael Nadal and Rituals](#).

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### **About Deepak Jayaraman**

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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