

Seeing Opportunities Over Obstacles in Tennis

The Bagel Perspective:

I came across a story on a podcast recently that resonated deeply with how tennis players, and coaches approach challenges and opportunities on and off the court. It's about two runners and their contrasting perspectives, which can teach us a lot about mindset.

The Story

During a big running event, there was a surprise at the finish line: free bagels for all participants! Two friends reached the end of the run, and one of them, let's call him Luca was excited. He said to his friend, "Let's grab a bagel!"

However, his friend Adam, wasn't as enthusiastic. He replied, "Nah, there's a long line." This response highlights a common mindset in both life and tennis: focusing on obstacles rather than opportunities. Luca, on the other hand, saw things differently. He insisted, "But it's free bagels!"

Despite Luca's excitement, Adam remained focused on the inconvenience of the line. He even suggested skipping the free bagels and heading to a coffee shop to go and buy some instead. But Luca stayed persistent, undeterred, he jumped into the line, leaned in when it was his turn, and quickly grabbed a couple of bagels. The two of them ended up enjoying the reward after all, without much trouble.

The Decision

This small decision to see the opportunity and act made all the difference. What appeared to be a daunting line was minor in reality, and Luca was rewarded for focusing on the opportunity rather than the obstacle.

The Lesson for Tennis Players

This story perfectly parallels the challenges and decisions we face in tennis. The "bagels" in your tennis journey might be:

- A chance to take initiative in a match.
- An opportunity to improve a skill that feels awkward at first.
- The courage to compete well and win a match against a tough opponent.
- Or even the opportunity to push through a physically demanding practice.

The "line" represents the obstacles that seem to block us: the fear of failure, the effort required, or the discomfort of stepping out of your comfort zone. Like Adam, it's easy to focus on the obstacles and miss out on growth. But those who embrace the challenge and see the opportunity unlock their potential.

As a coach, I see this dynamic all the time. Players who see the opportunity in every training session, match, or setback progress faster and enjoy the game more. Those who fixate on obstacles, like tough conditions or a difficult opponent, often hold themselves back.

The Call to Action

Think about your approach to tennis. Are you someone who sees opportunities like Luca, or do obstacles stop you in your tracks? How often do you let a “line” discourage you from going for your “bagels”?

Next time you face an obstacle, whether it’s tough conditions, a new tactic, or a gruelling training session, remind yourself of the bagels. The reward is often closer than you think, and the perceived obstacles are rarely as daunting as they appear.

As coaches, I thought this story is a great reminder for us too. When working with players, do we help them see the opportunities in every obstacle? Do we empower them to navigate the “lines” in their tennis journey and show them that rewards often come with persistence and the right mindset?

The Final Word

Tennis, like life, is full of opportunities disguised as challenges. Your mindset determines how you respond. Choose to focus on the opportunities, and you’ll not only improve your game but also find more joy in the journey.

This story inspired me to reflect on how I can help players, and myself, approach tennis with an opportunistic mindset. By focusing on what can be gained instead of what stands in the way, we’re more likely to take big steps forward, both in our game and personal development.

So, the next time you face a long line, figuratively or literally, ask yourself: Is the bagel worth it? Chances are, it is.

Keep working on your game,

GP.