

Designing a Lifelong Learning Approach to Tennis and Achievement

Georgetown University and StarrMark Tennis Academy

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I. Introducing the Problem and the Client

The problem came about after multiple rounds of conversation with the coaches. One of the players with a high growth potential quit after practice one day, saying that it was just “too much for him” and he was frustrated with his performance. Apparently, this is a recurring event for this player, and she indicated that once she reaches out again and coaxes him to come back, he would, and the dance would continue until the next “I quit” happened.

Stories like this existed across the board, over the years, at this academy. Many players, of all levels, end up quitting the sport, particularly during their junior year, when the intensity of schoolwork and social lives and college applications take precedence over their tennis careers. This can be a loss for the coaches and parents, who have spent years and countless resources investing in these young tennis players. And it may be a loss for the players themselves, who may end up losing a valuable relationship with the coaching staff, a valuable source of friendship from their peer players, and a valuable outlet for physical activity.

I spoke with Starr, the head of StarrMark Academy, to discuss a learning engagement designed to address the issue, open a conversation about burnout, and prevent this from arising within their young players.

The learners of the engagement are all the players of the academy, who span the ages of 3 to 18 years old. There are also several affiliated players who are in college or who have graduated from college, so the range extends up to 25 years old. Cultivating a healthy approach to tennis across the entire lifespan is the ultimate goal of this initiative. “Lifelong play” is the phrase that Starr often uses. Therefore, we could extend the age range all the way up to reach our adult players.

However, for the purposes of the initial form of the initiative, we decided to begin with the high school aged players, 14-18 years old. We have a large amount of students from Seaton and DeMatha, two well-resourced private schools in the DC area. Students from these schools tend to have a high level of college attainment, and aspire to attend top-tier colleges like Georgetown and Howard. They also tend to have a large amount of homework, engage in extracurricular activities and take IB or AP courses. Their families pay considerable amounts of money and time to invest in the players’ tennis careers, and so the families skew towards the middle class.

The clients themselves, Starr and Mark, have a unique approach in the administration and ethos of their tennis academy. They are a small company, without any brick and mortar to their business. They pay for permits at local parks, one in Bethesda, Maryland, and one in Georgetown. Starr is a full time private coach for families and individuals in the DMV, and Mark is a private coach as well as the coach for the DeMatha high school tennis team. The academy itself refers to the community that they are able to build with their private clients, who they bring together to train on public courts throughout the week. They have built a group of over 50 students of all ages, and they are keen on inviting parents into the conversation, building healthy relationships with each player and their guardians. They also seek to create a holistic approach within their academy, and at times have included lessons on athletics with an athletics coach, yoga with one of the parents who is an instructor, and nutrition with one of the parents who is a nutritionist. We often discuss themes of awareness, resilience, and mindfulness while on the court, and we also discuss how to balance academics, how to set goals, and how to compete in tournaments.

Given the scope of the issue, we also decided to invite parents into the fold, and we wanted to tailor aspects of our design to consider parents actively in the conversation. Based on research with more senior tennis players, of college age and beyond, their reflections talked about the role that the parent-player relationship played in the development of their tennis career. Parents

played a pivotal role for many players in supporting their child, but there were also clear periods of tension and conflict that arose between players and the parents, which may have contributed to stress, pressure, strained relationships, and even burnout. Engaging parents was an opportunity to consider the huge role that parents/guardians have in their children's tennis careers, and could afford us the opportunity to share best practices on how to cultivate a healthy parent-player "team."

In order to design an initiative that would accomplish these goals, we had to define clear goals and create a holistic approach. In addition to discussion with the clients, Starr and Mark, I surveyed the literature on burnout, which is summarized below. Synthesizing client expertise with academic research, we came to identify some key skills, attitudes, and characteristics that we thought would be critical to building burnout resilience. I chose to design an in-person workshop in order to test-run this initiative, and open the conversation with players, parents and coaches. This initial workshop was intended as a rough draft, and an opportunity to test the waters, gauge interest, and identify the desires and needs of the players and parents. It was also an opportunity to test some of the techniques and skills that we identified as being critical to avoiding burnout. Although it was publicized and delivered as a workshop, for my purposes it functioned more as a focus group with my clients and intended learners.

II. Initial Considerations and Constraints

1. Location, Timing, and other logistical components

The location of the initial learning engagement was intended for Georgetown, as a sort of immersive experience for players and parents to experience the college environment. Starr expressed this desire to bring the conversation to Georgetown from our first conversation. She is passionate about the power of exposing young players to new environments to maximize their learning, as shown in her commitment to bringing players to International Tennis Federation tournaments.

2. Usefulness / adaptability to multiple age groups

The expansive age range of students at the academy is considerable, posing challenges in presenting content that is digestible to players of different ages. The circumstances, development, and intellect of players along the age range can vary greatly. For the initial design

process, we chose to proceed with high school players in mind, but the initiative may expand to address other age groups as well.

3. Creating buy-in / perceived usefulness for all parties, as it presents an additional time commitment for parents/players/coaches

This initiative is an additional time and resource commitment to my clients as well as the learners. Therefore, the marketing and value proposition of this initiative must be made clear to coaches, players and parents. This consideration was the primary motivation for making the first workshop centered around a college player panel—this is something that is easily marketed to all parties, as college and college athletics are interesting and valuable subjects for most Americans.

4. Feasible, sustainable approach that can be run by existing personnel with minimal resources.

This initiative has to be placed in the context of the relatively minimalistic identity of SMA. They do not have a brick-and-mortar location, have only 2 full-time and 2 part-time employees, and have minimal administrative support. Much of their marketing and communications goes through phone calls and text messages, and any bigger events and initiatives must be planned and coordinated almost entirely through the two head coaches, Starr and Mark. This extra work lands on top of their already existing schedules as full-time coaches. This means that this initiative must be relatively self-sustaining, or must be able to fit into the existing infrastructure and timing of the academy itself. In other words, it must be possible to communicate its value through phone and text messaging, and it must have flexible and accessible location options. Lastly, the majority of the initial planning and coordination must be done by me in order to minimize the administrative burden placed on the head coaches.

III. Client Core Values

In discussion with my clients, I distilled four key values that form the guiding ideology of the academy, and can be useful frameworks to build upon for the learning engagement. I call them big ideas here, and in the subsequent section I will rewrite these core values into the language of educational outcomes, as core concepts.

Whenever we discussed burnout, Starr kept returning to the term “lifelong play.” When explaining what she meant, she often pointed to some examples and counter-examples. Obviously, she wanted to avoid having students quit tennis in the middle of their high school careers, and she also wanted to avoid students believing that tennis in college *has to be at the Division 1 level*. In other words, she wanted to communicate to students that playing tennis across the lifespan is not only possible, but accessible. For her, lifelong play was about cultivating a love for tennis that was independent of results, but more centered around the joy of playing and being in community. For me, lifelong play is the overarching framework that she wanted to build this learning engagement around.

Another big idea is the *balanced priorities* approach that SMA has around tennis, school, and other aspects of life. SMA coaches speak very closely with parents about their kids’ lives in school and beyond, and players are actively welcomed to share those details with coaches on the court too. We often create parallels between academics and athletics when talking about the importance of preparation and performance (e.g., studying for a test or giving a presentation), and in scheduling we encourage parents and players to consider their homework and school commitments first and foremost. The big idea, then, is that tennis is not the ultimate priority for our players, nor do we expect it to be. Rather, tennis, and all other commitments, coexist within a players’ life and they must balance those priorities in a sustainable manner.

Alongside this holistic approach to a students’ time is the *whole person* approach that coaches have towards the players. SMA coaches do not just care solely about a player’s winning and losing, but rather their character, sportsmanship, and resilience are much more important factors. Coaches instill order and discipline within practices with the intention of creating organized, structured behavior on and off the court. Players must stand in a line, holding their racquets with both arms as the coaches address them. Players must hurry to clean up the tennis balls off of the court when coaches announce. There are punishments when players say cuss words or hit their racquets or tennis balls in anger or frustration. Beyond discipline, coaches often stress the importance of skills like remaining composed and resilient despite hardship and distraction, and working hard without quitting. All of these values surface during practices and matches, and coaches are clear about their importance.

A fourth core value is *teamwork*. Tennis may seem like an individual sport, but at SMA coaches encourage players to consider their peers and their parents and coaches as part of their team. Parents are in regular communication with coaches about their children's schedules and development. Parents play a pivotal role in providing for their students' financially and emotionally, paying for racquets and equipment, tournament fees/travel, and practice costs, while also accompanying their children through difficult losses or moments of stress. During practice, coaches instill the importance of helping others in need and supporting their teammates. Players are encouraged to share advice with each other and share equipment if someone is missing something.

IV. Core Concepts + Knowledge and Skills + Essential Questions

Core Concept: Lifelong play → Students will cultivate and sustain a healthy relationship with tennis.

Knowledge and Skills

Students will be able to identify their reasons for playing tennis.

Students will have some sense of direction with the sport, and be able to speak about their goals in the near and distant future.

Students will be able to imagine several different models of future play and identify themselves within one.

Students will build a personal understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Students will identify and implement key techniques for injury prevention and recovery.

Essential Questions

Why do I choose to play tennis? What would happen if I stopped playing tennis?

Why do people get burnt out? What are the major causes? How do I prevent that from happening to me?

How do people get career-impacting injuries? How do I prevent injury and maximize recovery if I do get injured?

What does motivation look like, versus resistance? What are my sources of motivation compared to my causes of burnout?

How can I tell if I'm at risk of burning out, and what path do I follow once I recognize that?

Core Concept: Balanced priorities → Students will understand tennis as existing alongside other life priorities and will be able to balance them in a healthy manner.

Knowledge and Skills

Students will be able to identify the major priorities in their lives.

Students will be able to evaluate the extent to which they are meeting those priorities at any given point in time.

Students will be able to identify how to optimize their time and energy according to the priorities they care about the most.

Essential Questions

Why is it important to have and know my priorities?

What are my major priorities?

Are my time and commitments aligned with my priorities?

Why is one priority more satisfied than another? Is that okay with me, or do I want to redistribute my time and resources to adjust?

Core Concept: Character and discipline → Students will identify and cultivate the key character traits that they wish to cultivate as young people and as tennis players.

Knowledge and Skills

Students will be able to point to specific actions and attitudes as examples and counterexamples based on their lives, media figures, and the people around them.

Students will be able to understand the importance of discipline in achieving their goals without the need of external orders.

Essential Questions

What character traits are important to me? Why are they important?

How do I express these character traits?

How can I improve along these traits?

Core Concept: Teamwork → Students will come to identify themselves as part of a supportive team, rather than a sole individual playing tennis.

Knowledge and Skills

Students will be able to identify the members of their team and what role each of them play.

Students will be able to recognize the role they may play in supporting their teammates.

Students will be able to identify and follow a conflict resolution path when issues arise within their team.

Essential Questions

What difference does it make to be an individual versus a team member?

What role do others play in my tennis career, and what role do I play for others?

How can my team members best support my needs? What are my needs?

What should I do when conflict arises within my team?

V. Lifelong Play & Burnout Prevention

For the scope of this learning engagement, I focused primarily on the core concept of lifelong play, distilling the skills, knowledge and attitudes that would best accomplish these. One major threat to lifelong play is burnout, as discovered in my initial client conversations. A review of the literature¹ has illustrated that athlete burnout may stem from multiple factors, summarized in the table below (Gustafsson, 2017). The cause of burnout is listed on the left, whereas the “Inverse of Cause” column can be thought of as a kind of treatment or solution.

Burnout Cause	Inverse of Cause	Explanation
“Have to” versus “want to”	Intrinsic motivation	When athletes express a feeling of “entrapment or obligation,” this is positively correlated with burnout. On the other hand, if athletes are able to express an intrinsic source of motivation, such as joy when playing, or joy in camaraderie, this is negatively associated with burnout.
“Devaluation of Sport”	Purpose	When athletes are unable to express clear reasons about the value that the sport has in their lives, they may question their commitment to the sport and begin devaluing its role in their lives. Losing a sense of value or purpose about a sport is positively correlated with burnout. Connecting with one’s desire and purpose in a sports context may reduce the risk of burnout.
Perfectionism	Acceptance, Improvement	The personality traits associated with perfectionism are positively correlated with burnout. Perfectionism

		is a tendency to focus on insufficiencies, and in the sports context, it may manifest as a negative self-talk, and a failure to recognize one’s accomplishments.
Chronic exhaustion	Rest, Energy, Support	Exhaustion is both a cause and a symptom of burnout. A feeling of exhaustion in a sports context that fails to go away even after healthy lifestyle changes may be considered burnout. A failure to address exhaustion through rest and lifestyle change may result in burnout.

A diagnostic for the condition has not been fully developed, although an adaptation of the Burnout Questionnaire has been created to apply specifically to athletes in the Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ) (Gustafsson, 2017). This ABQ contains more detailed markers to look for signs of burnout, and they depend largely on self-reporting data.

Treatments for burnout have been identified, although in this review¹, the “effective” treatments that are discussed are forms of diagnostic care (Gustafsson, 2017). That is, these treatments are for athletes who have already been diagnosed with burnout and receive care to treat it. A summary of these treatments are in the below table.

Approach	Lever	Impact on Root Causes
Optimize “job-person fit”	Build “congruence” between athletes and their environment. A supportive environment.	Enhances rest and energy
Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT)	Creates realistic goals and perspective to prevent feelings of meaninglessness/devaluation of sport	Increases acceptance / improvement Cultivates purpose
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)	Cultivate presence, mindfulness, and joy. Enhances feelings of “want to” by enabling joy, which may translate	Cultivates intrinsic motivation Increases acceptance / improvement

	to intrinsic motivation	
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However, for the purposes of this initiative, finding preventative measures for burnout was more important. The closer a student is to being diagnosed with burnout, their risk of quitting may increase, so our approach does not want to wait for students to be diagnosed before beginning to treat the underlying causes of the condition.

The client wished to focus more on prevention, and so to guide the design of our intervention, I isolated a few key findings from the burnout prevention literature.

1. Key research instruments exist to measure burnout before it reaches a severe state.

These instruments come primarily from workplace research. The most utilized is called the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), and it assesses burnout along three factors: exhaustion, depersonalization (feeling disconnected and disengaged at work), and lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1981). It is a questionnaire. The Athlete Burnout Questionnaire is based on this instrument.

2. A second instrument, called the Areas of Worklife Scale, exists to measure burnout factors from the organizational standpoint. It is based on the job-person fit model of burnout (Maslach, 2012).

This instrument includes six different factors that may affect employees' experience of burnout in their specific organizational context. These factors are : work overload, lack of control, insufficient reward, breakdown of community, absence of fairness, and value conflict (Maslach, 2012).

3. Interventions may approach the issue from a person-directed approach, an organization-directed approach, or a blended approach (Awa, 2010).

Person-directed approaches aim to have more therapeutic treatment angles or seek to build skills amongst employees. Organization-directed approaches change the nature of work and decision-making, usually to give employees more autonomy and control over their time. Blended approaches incorporate elements of both, with the organization building resources and infrastructure that can support both self-directed and facilitated treatments. These blended approaches have been shown by preliminary research to be effective and sustainable.

With this in mind, we adopted a blended approach to preventing burnout amongst students at SMA. On the personal side, interventions would strive to:

1. Increase feelings of personal accomplishment
2. Cultivate optimal energy through rest, recovery, and work cycles
3. Drive personal connection through autonomy and responsibility
4. Enhance interpersonal involvement through community and connection
5. Implement acceptance and mindfulness to reduce perfectionism and devaluation

On the organizational side, we would wish to:

1. Create explicit recognition of academic importance even during tennis practice.
2. Incorporate parents as involved team members, to reduce miscommunication and create coherent synergy between family units and coaching staff.
3. Build ownership and personal responsibility amongst players by increasing their autonomy within practice and outside of practice.
4. Create a larger team identity even though tournaments are individually-oriented.
5. Build in explicit timing and resources for monthly check-ins between coaches and parents, quarterly workshops that invite parents, and yearly team-wide reviews and goal setting sessions.

Implementing all of these interventions would fall outside of the scope of this learning engagement, but the strategy and thought that informs each idea can be usefully repurposed or implemented at a later date.

VI. Learning Outcomes for Burnout Prevention

I've translated these preventative approaches into learning goals, which are displayed below.

Expressing why / intrinsic motivation	Be able to state explicitly why they wish to play tennis and the value that the sport brings to their lives now and in the future
Balanced workload	Be able to use time management techniques, organization, and priority-setting to create and handle a manageable workload
Supportive team/parent	Assess the quality of their parental relationship in the sports context specifically

Recovery	Understanding how and when to rest, as well as its importance in life and the sport
Mindfulness	Ability to be in the present, letting go of past and future fixations both on and off the court
Realistic goal setting and accomplishments	Identify priorities and create realistic goals that align with those. Experience rewards and feelings of accomplishment.

These goals are important competencies, but creating exercises like these are not the point, neither is their completion when asked to by coaches. Rather, the underlying change that is desired is more important than the activities themselves. What is intended is that these are training exercises that will allow the student to develop their understanding and belief in these concepts, creating an internal compass of what their desires are, as well as the ability to plan and invest time and energy into those desires.

These individual competencies are difficult but not impossible to assess. Requiring a student to reflect at a particular moment upon prompting is a lot different than building a reflective practice. There is no guarantee that students will adopt the desired mindset and attitude that undergirds these learning outcomes. However, by creating these practices as examples and encouraging students to make them their own, we can hope to drive shifts in mindset and attitude.

VII. Organizational Infrastructure for Burnout Prevention

The organizational infrastructure that will accompany and facilitate the learning outcomes of the prior section are detailed here. These components are designed to create explicit spaces for these learning outcomes to be assessed and continuously reinforced.

1. Monthly check-ins between coaches and players.

These check-ins are designed to be brief discussions of the players’ current state as a tennis player and a young person. Check-ins like these occur already informally, but making it an explicit practice can encourage the more reticent players to start the practice of healthy communication with their coach.

2. Quarterly workshops for players, coaches, and parents

These workshops are designed to bring parents into the conversation. Having these touchpoints where parents are involved can enhance communication among parents, players, and coaches, which can inform and guide the family units and coaching staff with more nuances about the other party. These workshops serve an introductory purpose, outlining or reiterating the key skills and concepts that will be addressed in that quarter and beyond. The initial workshop series that I outline below is built around the core concept of lifelong play.

3. Yearly performance reviews and goal setting sessions

These reviews are designed to be in-depth discussions of a players' progress and outlook. They involve the player, parent, and primary coach, who come together to review the player's performance that year based on the prior year's goals. They also allow space to set new goals for the upcoming year, considering the nuances of the player's/family's life at that point.

VIII. A Workshop Series

My learning engagement is intended as a long term initiative, and the first manifestation of it is as a series of workshops, the first of which was conducted at Georgetown on Wednesday, December 11th. This workshop convened SMA high school players from Seaton and DeMatha, along with their parents, and college players from Georgetown University and Morgan State University.

The Initial Workshop: The Tennis Journey

For a more detailed view of the workshop itself, please reference this [Run of Show](#) document, which includes information about the timing, tools, techniques, and activities that were conducted during the workshop. This [Workshop Presentation](#) slide deck is the presentation that I used while facilitating the workshop. This [Worksheet 1: Storytelling Exercise about Motivation vs. Burnout](#) is the worksheet I used for the first activity, and this second [Worksheet 2: Wheel of Priorities](#) is for the second activity.

With the concept of lifelong play in mind, I set a small, more attainable goal for an initial workshop. A lifelong goal does not lend itself well to a one-and-done workshop. Therefore the initial workshop was intended as starting a conversation, rather than ending one. I wanted to introduce the concepts about burnout that I had distilled from the literature and that Starr and Mark had identified from their coaching experience. I also wanted to introduce some key

competencies that were shown to be effective in reducing burnout. Lastly, Starr, Mark and I each wanted to create a chance for students to see the “ups and downs” of the tennis journey, and gain some perspective from more senior players about what tennis could look like in their futures.

This last goal was where the planning of the workshop began: inviting college players to be on a panel to talk about their journeys to becoming college athletes. This aligned well with Starr’s initial desire to hold a workshop on Georgetown’s campus. We reached out to college athletes to invite them to serve on our panel, and the first workshop featured five college athletes—three from Georgetown University and two from Morgan State University who had been affiliated with Starr Mark Academy and had served temporarily as assistant coaches. Beginning with college athletes had the added benefit of being evidence that longterm play is possible. They are real-life examples that tennis can continue past high school, into college.

One other impact of the college player panel was its role as a hook, sparking natural interest among players and parents. It would drive up attendance, and also be a useful starting point, allowing all to receive more insight on what tennis looks like in the future. It also allowed space for questions around how to balance priorities and still be successful, which was a key competency.

Part One: The College Player Panel

The workshop was broken up into two parts. The first part was the college player panel and the second were the backwards-designed learning activities I had prepared.

To begin the session, I asked each person in the audience to pose one question about what theme or question they were curious about hearing from the college players. I then facilitated the panel, incorporating the themes and questions that were proposed by the audience. I also aimed to prompt the college players to touch on some of the key knowledge and skills that I wanted to discuss for the activity portion of the workshop.

Following the facilitated discussion, I opened the Q&A back up to the audience to pose any last questions. I then thanked the college players, we took a short break, and we debriefed the panel by asking the audience about what one takeaway they got from the panel.

Part Two: Backwards-Designed Activities

Below is the 3-stage process of the Understanding by Design matrix, applied to the design of this initial workshop.

1. Stage 1. The core concept is: Students will understand what a healthy and sustainable tennis relationship is.

The desired knowledge and skills for students to emerge with:

- Students will be able to identify their reasons for playing tennis.
- Students will have some sense of direction with the sport, and be able to speak about their goals in the near and distant future.
- Students will be able to imagine several different models of future play and identify themselves within one.
- Students will build an understanding and identify skills in how to balance multiple competing priorities as both students and athletes.
- Students will build a personal understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Students will thoughtfully consider the questions:

- Why do I choose to play tennis? What would happen if I stopped playing tennis?
- Why do people get burnt out? What are the major causes? How do I prevent that from happening to me?
- How do people get career-impacting injuries? How do I prevent injury and maximize recovery if I do get injured?
- What does motivation look like, versus resistance? What are my sources of motivation compared to my causes of burnout?
- How can I tell if I'm at risk of burning out, and what path do I follow once I recognize that?

2. Stage 2: Evidence/Assessment

Students must be able to:

- Communicate clear reasons why they might or might not enjoy tennis at a given time

- Identify their sources of motivation using evidence and examples
- State their goals within a realistic time frame, considering other priorities
- Communicate what their priorities and values are as young players and people.
- Make an aspirational plan for their future

That suggests the need for specific tasks or tests like...

- Communicating with a college coach why you should be taken on as a recruit
- Discover the options for playing tennis at a recreational level in college or a new place
- Discover and enroll in adult tennis leagues
- Reach out to coaches and peer players to set up time for lessons and practices, independently of a coach or parent's prompting
- Successfully complete academic workloads while attending tennis practice.
- Ask for help and communicate needs with coaches or parents, especially when experiencing injury or burnout
- Know when and how to implement a rest and recovery routine
- Provide self-directed feedback on self-defined goals, track progress and identify areas of improvement

And can be addressed through reflective prompts such as:

- Tell a story about a time you experienced motivation.
- Tell a story about a time you experienced resistance/ burnout
- What are your priorities and how satisfied are they? Complete a priorities wheel.

3. Stage 3: Learning Activities

WHERE TO Model (Wiggins, 2005)

(W) The context of the workshop was to start introducing the concept of lifelong play by discussing what tennis playing could look like at the next phase of the high school players' careers: college. We would then introduce and start practicing the tools and techniques that would be needed to follow in a college players' footsteps.

(H) The hook of the panel was the college players themselves, and their expertise.

(E) It was designed to pull on players/parents' curiosities about the college athlete experience. The Q&A brought out the themes that we would be discussing, and identified key areas of interest.

(R) The next phase of the workshop placed the onus on players to reflect on their current moment in their tennis journeys, considering what they learned from the panel. They talked about their sources of motivation, moments they have felt symptoms of burnout, as well as how they handle their current set of priorities and workloads.

(E) We reconvened after each reflective worksheet exercises to discuss what they had identified as their key sources of motivation/burnout, as well as the key areas of concern in terms of managing their workloads/priorities.

(T) This was a student-centric design, and the content of the panel was based on their own interests. The content of the worksheets was informed by their own lives as well. It was also informed by their backgrounds as tennis players at academically challenging high schools.

(O) The timing was set to be for 90 minutes, and we progressed deeper into the topics that were initially raised by the college panel.

Activity 1 (Worksheet: [Storytelling Exercise about Motivation vs. Burnout](#))

The goal of this activity was to get students to develop an internal compass around what motivates them and what might drain them or cause burnout. Rather than providing prescriptive elements or examples, I wanted to begin with the students' stories themselves, so that they may start to identify internally how motivation/burnout manifests within. Developing this emotional awareness is a critical competency, and it is connected to other larger outcomes in burnout prevention.

This worksheet was an assessment and an activity, designed to prompt students to reflect and identify within themselves what drive/motivation looks like, and what its opposite, resistance/burnout, may look like. The prompted storytelling exercise asks them to think of a specific moment when they felt *drive*, describing the situation in detail, then detailing their emotions, and finally discussing who else was there who had an impact on the situation, and how it was resolved. The second exercise follows the same format, except about a moment when they felt *resistance*.

Activity 2 (Worksheet: [Wheel of Priorities](#))

The goal of this activity was to communicate the key understanding that priorities may often conflict with one another; tennis, academics, sleep, and a social life do not exist in siloes, but rather they are all connected and draw on the same resources and time. Again, the goal is to begin with students' own life examples and place them on the wheel of priorities, and for them to assess how fulfilled they are in those priorities. They can then be able to identify categories in which they are underperforming, and see how they might reallocate their attention to address those shortcomings. This is a useful tool for them to practice regularly, perhaps in monthly check-ins with themselves or their coaches. This ensures that they are living in line with what is important to them, and it helps them in setting realistic goals and evaluating how they might optimize the achievement of their goals.

Evaluation of the Workshop

Overall, the workshop was an informative opportunity for me to get to know more about the clients and the learners, and it was an effective introduction to the series for the parents, players, and my clients, Starr and Mark. Parents left generally positive reviews of the workshop, and parents/players explicitly expressed things that they had learned:

- One student and his parent appeared to have very different views around the future of the child's career in tennis, and this tension was evident.
- Another student/parent duo took away clear learnings about the process of reaching out to coaches to be recruited as a college athlete, as well as the importance of resting for at least 3 days or until there is no pain after an injury.
- A third duo took away from the storytelling exercise the insight that the conditions of play that were important to the player, namely his sensitivity to the winter weather and his dislike for playing indoors, whereas his mother expressed the importance of parental support that became apparent after listening to the college players.

Both my clients and the audience expressed a strong interest in doing more workshops, and several parents requested my contact information to receive further guidance, mentorship, and information for their children.

Future Workshop Ideas

Given the success of the initial session, I will likely continue to develop this initiative as a workshop series, and perhaps as a new organizational structure as detailed in [Section VII](#). Here is a brief outline of several possible future workshops.

- Workshop 2: The many forms of lifelong tennis

This workshop would extend the forms of tennis-playing beyond D1 College Tennis, with the goal of cultivating an attitude of lifelong play regardless of skill level. We would invite college club players, recreational adult players, competitive adult athletes, as well as adult beginners into the conversation. This would allow us to open the audience of the workshop to players of all skill levels, and it could lead to more detailed insight on what value lifelong play can bring to players regardless of their skill level or circumstances. This means that players who are recreational or lack sufficient time for competitive tennis can define for themselves the role that tennis plays in their lives and their futures. Themes of health, social life, and enjoyment might appear more naturally in this workshop, and the activities would be more adapted to those themes.

Workshop 3: Key strategies for academic/professional and athletic accomplishment

This workshop would be more detailed about the specific techniques that players can use to balance their time, so they can lead a balanced lifestyle and prevent burnout. It could draw on the experiences of current SMA players, as well as some college or adult players. Players would identify techniques that their peers use to achieve at a high level either academically, professionally, athletically, or in all of the above. This is a chance to lean into the themes of balance, as well as open an opportunity for a team identity to be built. The players themselves would be the experts in the session, and it would be a mutual learning opportunity.

Workshop 4: Kaizen, Mastery-Approach and Goal Setting

This workshop would introduce the concept of a Mastery-Approach mindset, which is negatively associated with burnout (Isoard-Gauthier, 2015). Another way of stating this mindset is to use the Japanese term *kaizen*, which loosely translates to “continuous improvement.” This workshop would be intended to influence students to adopt this *kaizen* attitude, and it would include goal setting activities that are in line with this mindset. This could be the annual,

team-wide workshop that involves all players, parents, and coaches. And it could be a chance to set goals as an organization.

X. Tools, Spaces, and Assessment

I believe that these are amply discussed in the prior sections, but I have written them out more explicitly in this section.

For the space and tools, I implemented the workshops using an in-person modality, with a Zoom option. I utilized Car Barn 315 and its screens to present with slides that helped me facilitate the session. I created my advertisements for the session using Canva, and disseminated them via text message. I also used Canva for the worksheets I used during the session.

I set up the space in a circular format, with each of the tables organized around the center, with all participants facing the center. The panelists were part of this circle, although they were positioned right in front of the screens so they could be easily viewed on Zoom, with the presentation slides on the screens behind them. The circular layout was ideal as the workshop was meant to be a participatory exchange, with each panelist and participant sharing aspects of their story.

As for assessment, these skills are meant to be developed over time, and the exercises I introduced in the workshop will be re-introduced during practices, private coaching sessions, and in monthly check-ins. The player is the primary assessor, and their role is to be able to identify when and why they feel motivated or burnt out, and be able to follow a course of action if they feel they need to address their burnout. The player must also be able to assess what their own priorities are and to what extent they are fulfilling those. This self-assessment is guided and facilitated by coaches and parents, and it can become a built-in practice with something like a monthly check-in, but ultimately it is up to the player to carry it out.

XI. Annotated Bibliography

- Awa, W. L., Plaumann, M., & Walter, U. (2010). Burnout prevention: A review of intervention programs. *Patient education and counseling*, 78(2), 184-190.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2009.04.008>
 - Personal + organization-based burnout interventions are best.

- Effects can be shown to last 6 months, or 1 year, indicating the need for refresher courses
- Gustafsson, H., DeFreese, J. D., & Madigan, D. J. (2017). Athlete burnout: Review and recommendations. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 16, 109–113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.05.002>
 - Discusses multiple factors such as motivation (SDT), entrapment, cognitive-affective stress model, social organization problem
 - Discusses various treatments: congruence, CBT, ACT
- Isoard-Gauthier, S., Trouilloud, D., Gustafsson, H., & Guillet-Descas, E. (2016). Associations between the perceived quality of the coach–athlete relationship and athlete burnout: An examination of the mediating role of achievement goals. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 22, 210–217. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2015.08.003>
 - Details the importance of quality coaching relationships with clear communication and joint goal setting.
 - Discusses the two by two matrix of goal types, either mastery or performance based, and approach or avoidance. Mastery-approach is the most negatively associated with burnout.
- Leiter, M. P., & Maslach, C. (2016). Latent burnout profiles: A new approach to understanding the burnout experience. *Burnout Research*, 3(4), 89–100. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.burn.2016.09.001>.
 - Profiles that are not fully burnt out nor engaged, but have one of the 3 traits associated with burnout. Overextended, disengaged, ineffective.
 - Disengaged might be the most troublesome, even more than overextended, indicating the need for engagement assessment over exhaustion assessment.
- Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. *Journal of organizational behavior*, 2(2), 99-113. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030020205>
 - Different factors of burnout: exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment
 - Some optional factors: involvement/connection with others
- Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Leiter, M. P. (1997). Maslach Burnout Inventory: Third edition. In C. P. Zalaquett & R. J. Wood (Eds.), *Evaluating stress: A book of resources* (pp. 191–218). Scarecrow Education.

- Self-reporting burnout questionnaire, with Likert-scale questions like: I feel emotionally drained by my studies. In my opinion, I am a good student. I doubt the significance of my studies.
- Maslach, C., Leiter, M. P., & Jackson, S. E. (2012). Making a significant difference with burnout interventions: Researcher and practitioner collaboration. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 33(2), 296–300. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41415754>
 - Consider unit-based and multi-level interventions. Individual and the organization, not just the individual. Gives recommendations on how to approach an intervention with a research-practitioner dual partnership.
- Otto, M. C. B., Van Ruysseveldt, J., Hoefsmit, N., & Dam, K. V. (2020). The development of a proactive burnout prevention inventory: How employees can contribute to reduce burnout risks. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(5) doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17051711>
 - Shows that some different types of individually-led employee burnout prevention techniques are shown to be effective. There are 9/12 factors that work well.
- Schaffran, P., Kleinert, J., Altfeld, S., Zepp, C., Kallus, K. W., & Kellmann, M. (2019). Early risk detection of burnout: Development of the Burnout Prevention Questionnaire for Coaches. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 714. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00714>
 - Different questionnaires and tools synthesized into one, can be useful for early identification. The relationships between factors is difficult to understand
- Wiggins, G. P., & McTighe, J. (2005). Planning for learning. In *Understanding by design* (2nd ed., pp. 191–226). Pearson.
 - Outlines the planning phases for learning activities using the backwards design approach and the WHERETO model.