

Don't be a Loser! Embrace the Backdraw

Edgar Giffenig



With names like “the losers’ bracket” or “the consolation draw” it is not surprising that some players and parents shun the back draw. However, the reality is that the back draw plays a very important role in player development. It offers valuable match opportunities to anyone smart enough to take advantage of it.

I am especially surprised when players who barely have a high enough ranking to make it into the tournament lose in the first round and then find excuses not to play the back draw. In their situation the back draw is really where their tournament starts, and doing well in it should be one of their main objectives of the total tournament experience right from the beginning.

Tournament play is essential in the development process. It is where players truly learn to win. It is the only place where they can understand how to deal with pressure, how to make the necessary adjustments during a match and how to apply the subtleties of the game.

An important aspect of a competitive coach's job is to schedule enough tournament play to allow players to internalize the experience and improve, and the best way to do this is by setting goals in terms of tournament matches per year.

This ideal number varies with age, with older players playing more, but top players average somewhere between 50 and 90 tournament matches per year. Therefore, any player wanting to remain competitive has to play a similar amount of matches or he/she will be left behind.

This is easier said than done because scheduling tournaments is easy but scheduling matches is much harder. If you schedule twenty tournaments a year and the player loses in the first round, he/she will only play 20 matches. At the other extreme, if the player wins all the tournaments, the total will add up to at least 80 – a huge difference.

When I was a national coach traveling with teams to ITF tournaments and pro tournaments where there was no back draw, I always made it clear to my players that as long as we were on the road, the goal was to play as many competitive matches as possible. They could rally and drill back home, but during the tournaments, they should take advantage of all the other players on tour and play matches against a variety of opponents. Once out of the tournament, the goal was to find opponents to play as many matches per week as the players who were winning the tournaments – this was not quite the same as a tournament match but definitely challenging competition. A back draw would have made things a lot easier and productive for everyone.

Every competitive match is a small steppingstone in a player's career, and not enough competitive match play is the kiss of death. Play hard in the back draw. It is a great investment in yourself.