



Prepped & Polished, LLC
21 Eliot Street
South Natick, MA 01760

Announcer: Talkshoe; recorded live.

Alexis: Hello. Thanks for joining us for the Prepped and Polished radio show. I'm your host, Alexis Avila, licensed guidance counselor, private tutor, and founder of Prepped and Polished LLC., Tutoring and Test Prep, in beautiful South Natick, Massachusetts. The Prepped and Polished radio show is your educational insider. Our show is brought to you by Prepped and Polished LLC., where I'm the principal educator. To learn more about our firm, please visit PreppedAndPolished.com.

Thank you to everyone who's listening to the program. We appreciate you taking interest in the information we bring to families and educators around the globe. For future shows, updates, and ongoing relevant education news, please join our Facebook community by searching for Prepped and Polished and clicking Like. You can follow us on Twitter, [@preppedpolished](https://twitter.com/preppedpolished).

Joining our show today is Brian Lomax. Brian is Founder of PerformanceXtra, a Boston-based firm, where he coaches individuals and groups to realize their performance potential by focusing on the mental game and providing a framework for success. Brian is a certified mental toughness trainer by the Human Performance Institute. He has a Bachelor of Arts from Vanderbilt University. Prior to this role, Brian worked in corporate America as a consultant for various companies, such as Fidelity and Putnam Investments, and spent 35 years playing tennis, having been nationally ranked as recently as 2006, where he was ranked 2nd in the US for men's 35 singles.

We're delighted to have Brian on our show. He's going to share with us his wisdom and tips for gaining the competitive mental edge, not only in sports, but also academics and in life. Before we start, I want to make sure our listeners have our contact info. Our email address is radio@preppedandpolished.com. If you'd like to submit a question at any time, you can use that email address. Often, our listeners will have questions as they're listening or afterwards. We always appreciate hearing from our listeners. If you can email us at anytime, feel free: radio@preppedandpolished.com.



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Brian, are you there on the line?

Brian: Yes, Alexis. Good morning.

Alexis: Good morning to you. Thanks so much for joining us. Really appreciate it. How are you doing today?

Brian: I'm doing great. It's my pleasure to be here, so looking forward to this.

Alexis: Great. Just a little warm-up; Number 2 ranking in the entire US for men's age 35 Division in 2006. Pretty impressive. What's your . . .

Brian: Yeah. I have to say, actually, that the mental toughness piece is what took me there. I had not had results of that kind, prior to my turning 35. That result in some ways, Alexis, was a catalyst for starting PerformanceXtra.

Alexis: Wow. Amazing. Can you start out by telling us a little bit about PerformanceXtra, and how you came up with your company?

Brian: Sure. I really . . . I guess the mission of it, and you went through it there, in terms of what I'm trying to educate people on, in terms of the mental game. When I examine how we teach sports, or any really performance context, we often don't talk about what people are thinking and feeling, and what they should be doing to enhance their performance. Very often, a concept like mental toughness is left to the individual to either develop themselves or we believe that either you have it or you don't. Recent times have shown that that's not true, that mental toughness, competitive skills, and performance skills are trainable. They are things that are within our control.

PerformanceXtra is really an educational-based program to help train people on various concepts; they can make them mentally tougher, make them better competitors, make them better performers. In that way, it's different than sports psychology, only because sports psychology tends to look at issues or problems



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and deals with them. This is really more of a program about ‘let’s train this at any skill’, whether it’s an athletic skill or other physical skill. Let’s do the same on the mental side and bring you through a comprehensive program that trains you to be mentally tougher, as well as build character and become almost that relentless, ultimate competitor. I think that that has really resonated with a lot of students that have been looking for that extra edge in their performance.

Alexis: That’s fantastic. I was looking at your bio a bit, and I noticed that you left a career in corporate America to take on this endeavor with PerformanceXtra. What drew you to start your own business helping others develop mental strength . . .

Brian: I guess Number 1 is . . .

Alexis: . . . and leave a security of the Corporate America?

Brian: That’s right. Some people would say that it was a courageous jump, and perhaps it was. I think Number 1, a love of sports. Someone in my position, who wouldn’t want to have sports as a career in your life all the time? Because even when I was working in corporate America, as you can tell from my playing background, tennis was always there, was always my outlet for staying sane. I think it was also, Alexis, a realization of, “What am I really doing with my life?”

I felt like starting something like PerformanceXtra was much more meaningful to me than working at large financial services companies. While those companies certainly have their goals and their missions, I felt like my own mission was to help people perform better, because I had proved that I could do it myself. I wish that I had had a program like this when I was younger, not only just from the athletic aspect of it, but just from the character-building perspective. My ultimate mission in life now is to help younger people not only with their mental toughness, but also to start to work on designing their own life and using sports as a vehicle to do that and to help them build character so they have a framework for making some of the bigger decisions they’re going to have to make in life.



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Alexis: That makes so much sense, and applicable to kids and adults. Brian, from your experience, do you find that some people struggle more than others with the mental aspect of their proverbial game?

Brian: I would say for sure, and there are a lot of different reasons for that. I think if we start to talk more about younger athletes, there's such a fixation with winning, the bottom-line result; that that causes a lot of emotional distress, a lot of anxiety. One of the first things that I try to get athletes to shift to is away from a primary focus on that result because it only causes things like anxiety and emotional reactions, and really think about the process of how you play or how you perform. Really, what I call process-oriented thinking.

Once we can get someone to begin to understand that, focusing on the process will lead to good results, then they can start to be a little bit more mature, in terms of their reactions and they can start to regulate their own body language. They can start to regulate how they talk to themselves, which is going to get them more relaxed, get them away from being anxious and being emotional about winning and losing, and really look at it more as a process of learning, getting better, and only striving to perform your best. Playing your best and winning don't always equal each other. The same on the other side, playing your worst and losing don't necessarily equal each other either.

Alexis: Right.

Brian: That's a key mindset shift for a lot of people, and I think that's one of the basic things that younger people have a hard time with is, our focus on winning.

Alexis: Do you find that the real . . . the pros, the Number 1s and 2s in the tennis game, those are the ones that just have adopted really good strategies for keeping that mental toughness intact? Good self talk per se?

Brian: Yeah. I think it's a sales talk and it's also the body language, really. If you want to see how mentally tough a tennis player is, don't watch the points, watch what they do in between points. There is really a lot of very set behavior there. In fact, with



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tennis players, it's a very specific routine that I teach them about how to behave in between points. If you see someone at any level of tennis, they have poor body language; they're throwing their racket, or saying things out loud expressing frustration. That's not really a sign of mental toughness, and in fact, it's probably a sign of weakness and you're telling your opponent that, "I can't handle adversity. I can't handle a tough situation." When you watch the top players, I really ask players to watch in between the points. That's what you really need to emulate to start playing better tennis, because they always have positive, strong, confident body language. Although we can't hear what's going on in their head, the same thing is going on there, where they're also encouraging, supportive and positive.

Alexis: That's amazing. All these light bulbs went off in my head, because when I deal with students with tutoring, I'm thinking, "Maybe I should help them watch what they say in between questions."

Brian: Yeah, absolutely. Help them reframe, perhaps, how they look at things. Certainly, a character skill like optimism and positivity is very important for any performance, certainly academic and in testing. It's the same pressure that you're facing when you're taking a major exam that could determine some of your future outcomes, as well as playing in the final of a major tennis event; same performance anxieties are happening. Certainly, how you carry yourself and how you talk to yourself are very important.

Alexis: Absolutely. Can you tell us a little bit about the positive psychology in human performances courses you've completed, and how you've incorporated your positive psychology training into your practice?

Brian: Sure. First of all, I guess I'll define what positive psychology is, because it's often confused with straight-out positive thinking, which it's not. Positive psychology, essentially, has looked at the psychology industry and has noticed that the majority of money spent in psychology today is on fixing depression syndromes, psychological illness, with the goal of getting that person back to neutral. Positive psychology says, "We don't just want to have people at neutral, we want to have people be happier, be psychologically stronger so that they don't become susceptible to mental illness."



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On the physical side of things we do this, right? We have gyms, health clubs. That's working the positive side of our physical health. We don't necessarily spend a lot of money on the mental side. Positive psychology's goal is how you help people lead happier and more fulfilling lives so that you're not doing so much on the mental illness side?

There are some major tenants of positive psychology that certainly apply to performance. One of them we mentioned is positivity and optimism. Looking at anything, any one event that happens to you and seeing what the benefit of that would be, rather than by default a lot of people look at the negative of it. This is not to say that we're trying to turn people into Pollyanna's who see the . . . are just positive about everything. Regardless, there's no realism there. If you can't learn from things like mistakes, then you're ceiling for potential is much lower than the person who can take a mistake, understand why it happened, make an adjustment, and then improve.

The very famous positive psychology example is Thomas Edison inventing the light bulb. He didn't just roll out of bed one day, draw it up, and turn it on. There were probably upwards of 1,000 attempts at creating it. With each attempt, one could say it's a failure but he learned something from it, or his team learned something from it. They were able to apply those learnings to the next attempt, and then the next attempt. Finally, we had success. We view Thomas Edison and his team as successful people. We don't view them as failures, even though if you were to look at a win/loss graph they had many more failures than they had successes.

Alexis: Wow. Definitely [inaudible: 14:33] mistakes so makes so much sense. What are some tips you might have for a student who's really anxious taking tests? Any couple techniques that come to your mind that you can employ to help gain that confidence when you go into a high-pressure situation such as an SAT that determines your fate as to what college you get into?

Brian: I think it goes back to a little bit what we were discussing earlier, Alexis, with where is that person's focus? Is it on the result? Is there a tremendous amount of pressure to achieve a particular score? Most likely there is, right? I certainly



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remember that from my youth. Then it's, "Okay. Let's break that goal down. We want a certain score. How do we get there?" Break it down into a particular process. Is it getting tutoring, taking classes? Do I need to improve certain aspects of my math and verbal? Really, almost breaking it down into components and subcomponents so that you can improve in all of those lower level areas that you get really good on the stuff that you can control. You can't really control winning and losing, or getting the score directly. You have to go through a certain process to get there. It's at that lower level that you can exercise control.

Like anything, you're going to train and you're going to practice. That's where you build confidence. With each practice test that you take, examine it in a very honest way about, how did I do? Then where you did well, give yourself credit for that. It's almost like having a little confidence bank account. You want to make some deposits into that bank account, so that by the time you get to the actual test, you can start withdrawing money from that confidence bank account and apply it. You've done all the preparation, you've understood the test, in terms of how it's constructed, and you've broken it down into how I can control my results on this. You've practiced at that level. Then you can just execute at that point. I think it's very similar, in terms of how athletes train for big events.

Alexis: Definitely. Absolutely. When you trained to get your Number 2 standing for the US Men's, it wasn't just in the moment, your self-talk in between points, but I'm sure you've done . . . did you do a lot of preparation and practice to get you to that level?

Brian: Absolutely. In some regards, it's a build-up of a couple of years of preparation; mapping out what your goal is, understanding how you want to perhaps maximize some of your strengths, and also shore up some of your weaknesses, and then building upon that. That can take months. For me, there were certain things I wanted to do around how I move around the court; my footwork, my balance could be better. I improved that.

Even things like equipment; I upgraded rackets, I upgraded string. You really have to think about everything that's within your control. What could I do to improve that particular area? I think the more people begin to think about the



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process of any performance and what they actually control, and then breaking it down and trying to make little improvements over time, it's really going to benefit. It's not just, "I'm controlling what I'm saying to myself out on the court," even that takes training. It's putting the entire package together so that when I arrive at a big event and I say, "All right. Brian, have you prepared as well as you could have for this event?" I want to say yes. That's what gives me confidence, that I've done everything I needed to do, I've mapped out my strategy; how to show up at this particular event and do my best.

Alexis: That's great. Brian, do you find that working with your clients and helping them develop mental strength, whether it's on the tennis court or helping a student with a test overcoming anxiety, does it help them improve their confidence in life in general?

Brian: Yeah. I think confidence is not necessarily ubiquitous across all spheres of life. I can speak for myself as a tennis player when I was younger. I was certainly confident on the tennis court, but I was a bit of a disaster socially. It certainly can. If you apply the same principals of building confidence to other areas of your life, yes, you can. Just being confident in one area of life doesn't necessarily directly translate to others. If you apply that process that we were just talking about, say, "Hey. I want to get better socially so how do I figure that out? What are the things I need to do to do that?" It's a matter of applying the process, as opposed to just direct translation, if that makes sense.

Alexis: Yeah, that makes perfect sense, because when I was putting together these questions, I was thinking, "Man, I bet when you help a client on a tennis game, I'm sure they just go out into life feeling a lot more prepared and go in with this framework that they have, and it's just applicable outside of the tennis court." It can be a very powerful thing, what you're teaching people here.

Brian: Absolutely. We're just using sports as a vehicle for that, but we certainly touch on that. This is setting a framework for you to make a lot of decisions in the rest of your life.



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Alexis: Absolutely. Thanks, Brian. That was very helpful. Really appreciate your time. This wraps up our show today with Brian Lomax, at PerformanceXtra. Please visit PerformanceXtra.com to learn more about Brian's company. If you want to work on and improve your mental strength, whether it's at school, on the tennis court, I highly recommend Brian. Thank you, Brian.

Brian: Thank you, Alexis.

Alexis: My pleasure. Thank you for joining us on the Prepped and Polished radio show.