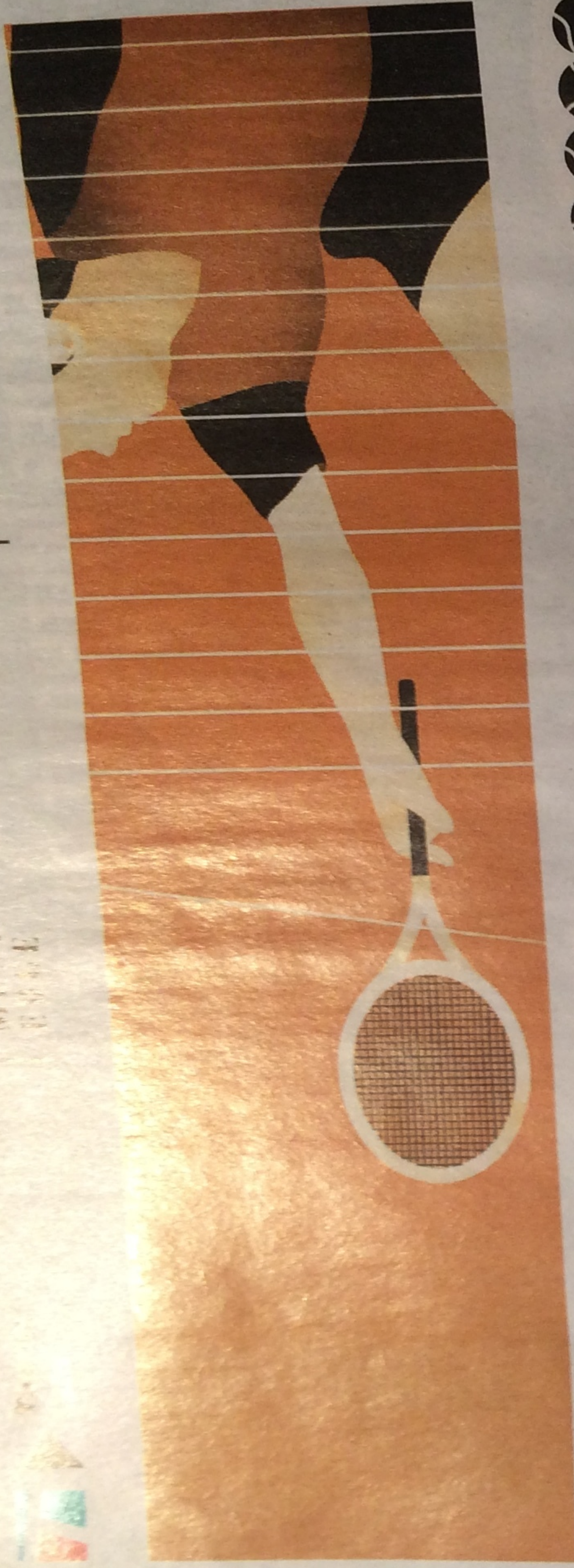


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MENTAL
EDGE



Small Points, Big Wins

Why it pays to
go all out,
all the time

We are all familiar with the pressures of big points—game point, break point, set point, match point—and we take steps to calm our nerves in hopes of becoming more effective on them. We slow down, take deep breaths, focus on our rituals, and keep our minds off the score. Sometimes these methods work; sometimes they don't.

BUT regardless of your ability to solve the mysteries of big points, there is another way to win matches that may be more helpful. And that is to put extra effort into winning small points. Since there is less pressure on these points, your nerves will be calmer, and you will be more likely to play your normal game. All that it takes to function well on these points is high motivation and high intensity.

The net result of this approach is earning more opportunities to win big points. And the more opportunities you have, the greater the chance you'll win.

Given the pressures of big points, you're going to lose some of them. When that happens, you must avoid

getting rattled. Train yourself to brush off big-point errors, knowing that they're simply part of the game. You'll be mentally ready to go after the subsequent little points. Win enough of them and you'll earn more break points. You will eventually prevail, because your nerves will become accustomed to the pressure and calm down, or by simple probabilities and good fortune.

Another good reason for going hard after little points is that you never know when one of them will turn out to be a crucial turning point. Consider a case where your opponent is serving and is up 30-0. This would not seem to be an important point, and many players would figure the game to be largely

out of reach. Often these players will try lower-percentage shots; do so and miss, and the score becomes 40-0. Now the game is truly likely to be lost.

But if you had played the 30-0 point hard and won it, you could have turned around the game. At 15-30 you are one point away from a de facto deuce—and a world of difference from 40-0.

In a close match, there is a very small difference in total points won between the winner and loser. In a 6-4 set, match winners win an average of just four more points than match losers, and the percentage difference is just a couple of points.

All of the great players realize this. This is why pros like Novak Djokovic, Andy Murray, Rafael Nadal and Maria Sharapova play every point with the same high intensity, never knowing which small point may turn the match. Since they can't be sure to win any particular big point, they compensate by constantly working to give themselves multiple opportunities.

There can be no certainty in hard-fought matches. So like the pros, it pays to stack the probabilities in your favor by exerting strong efforts on all the points, including the small ones. 