

"Talent is insignificant"

October 31, 2016



Last week the tennis elite joined the ATP tournament in the Wiener Stadthalle. In the middle: Dominic Thiem, Austria's best tennis player since Thomas Muster. How did he do it? His coach Günter Bresnik can explain everything.

They have been on the tennis court almost every day for more than thirty years. What fascinates you about this sport, Mr. Bresnik?

The archaic confrontation man against man, one against one-and that in one of the cultivable test forms that exist. For me, tennis is a beautiful metaphor for many aspects of life.

In your newly published book, the Dominic-Thiem Method, you refer to professional tennis as the laboratory of our society. In tennis there is always a winner. Is it not sometimes wiser to make compromises in life?

I'm not a friend of compromises. My readiness for conflict is very large, and there are certain things where I find that there should be no compromise, because it would be detrimental to both sides. But with the 'Laboratory of our society' I mean, for example, dealing with successes or defeats. Everyone wins or loses at some point in his life. There are great parallels between top sport and the free market economy.

How did you ever come up with the idea of writing a book?

This certainly has to do with the fact that I have an eventful year behind me in private. Within a short month, I lost my nephew by suicide and my father. If you like, I've also used the writing a bit as a therapy. But I would never have thought of it. Laura Seifert, the publisher, has said: "Do this, I always read your interviews, which are so interesting and so different than many other things I read "-Because you feel flattered of course. But I have extremely underestimated how much work that is.

The book is a mixture of autobiography and success counselor. How would you define it?

Textbook it should be none. I describe the career of Dominic-in connection with my development as a coach: My apprenticeship years, journeymen and master years.

You have known Dominic Thiem since he was eight years old. When did you realize that this could be what?

Whether an athlete achieves what he imagines depends on so many factors, even luck is part of it. But that Dominic basically has the qualities that I consider to be decisive in successful people, I have already recognized with him between ten and twelve. In his goals, the lad was never humble. But he was very humble in the way he approached it. I've also seen how patient he is. And patience is extremely important for a successful athlete-because there will always be setbacks. I remember the unrecognized disease, which has severely weakened him between 16 and 19. You've seen how high your stamina is. Also that he has been holding it with me as a trainer for 15 years is a quality criterion that one cannot appreciate high enough. I have always been aware of this when writing the book.

Are you such a hard coach?

I've already made a lot of demands on the kid. Especially from the time I said that he should at least be a top 100 player. And in my mind I sketched the player very early, which he is now almost.

Is there a career plan: Heuer Top ten, next year's top five?

There are goals, of course, but I never make them to ranked positions. This is about physical and playful, and also human developments. We'll set them together. If I had imagined something for this year, it would have been a place between 15 and 20. He has surpassed that by far.

In June, after the French Open, he was ranked seventh, currently he is number ten. When the years with Thiem were their master years, is he then your masterpiece?

To say that would be unfair to Dominic and his parents. He is the masterpiece of his parents or of the dear God. Working with him is my masterpiece.

You compare yourself in the book with a sculptor who forms a sculpture from a marble block.

Yes, but Dominic is just a marble block and not a pebble – this is extraordinary. And this marble block was sometimes still soft like sandstone, so that it could be processed well. Let's say this: Dominic was a marble block that already knew how to look.

Do you not have a lot of responsibility with such a project as a trainer?

Yes, they did. A little boy is probably listening to you more than the parents. And when I say something, it's more important than what the teacher says at school. If you attack a couple of times, it can lead to permanent damage. You have to be careful.

When Thiem was eleven, you changed his game radically. From then on he only had losses for a few years, before he had almost always won.

Yes, but what he won was meaningless. Many parents and also some coaches believe that this is special when one in Austria becomes a circle champion. But with these victories, only the hopelessness is overshadowed. You can't do anything internationally. I said to Dominic, "If you lose at 15, I don't care. What's important is what you win with 20. "

'Talent is insignificant', you wrote. "Exercise makes the master, not talent." So could anyone theoretically come to the top ten if he only works consistently enough?

According to my theory, yes. As talents, there are people who do less and still achieve more. And it just doesn't exist. There is no profession-and certainly not in sport. In the end, the best are always those who train properly over a longer period of time.

Could you summarize the Dominic Thiem method like this: it needs a coach who really knows it and a player who really wants it?

Yes, where "want" is a very stretchy term. When trying to reach a goal, many people are demoted to the goal. And the experience of being a coach after 30 years is of course a huge advantage. In this case, the optimal cooperation of the family comes.

At the age of 23, Thiem is the youngest player in the top ten. But behind him there are a few younger ones who are on his heels, such as 21-year-old Australian Nick Kyrgios or 19-year-old German Alexander Zverev. What are Thiems chances of becoming the number one in the world rankings?

I believe that in the next ten years the sport will no longer be dominated by a player like the last of Federer or Djokovic. There is a group of five to ten players who will make up the supremacy. And I think that Dominic is one of them. Kyrgios has the greatest potential in a playful way, Zverev probably has the best chances from the overall concept.

The tennis has been dominated in the last ten years by the so-called "Big Four"-Federer, Nadal, Djokovic and Murray. They were mostly a class better than anyone else. What distinguishes these players? You don't play tennis better, do you?

Yes, they play tennis better.

But how is that? Do the top players not all train the same amount?

No, there are big differences. An example: In September, at the tournament in Metz, training times at the center court were only to have before nine o'clock in the morning. And do you know who trained from 7:45 to 8:45 o'clock? Dominic and the David Goffin, number one and number two of the tournament. The others said: We prefer to sleep a bit longer and train in the evening. But in the evening Dominic has trained again!

I thought it was more about the fact that the best in crucial phases are simply cooler.

Why are they cooler? Because they are better prepared. The American Richard Savitt, Wimbledon champion 1951, once asked me, "Günter, what do you think of positive thinking?" I said: "That's basically fine. But it is more important for me to train properly and backhand. "He says," You are my husband! Instead of thinking positively, I have served 200 balls on cans every day-and I knew: If the Tiebreak is five to five, the probability is higher that I will hit the ball because I have practiced it more often. "This is quite clear to me: if one of the craft s professional, he can also apply it better under pressure.

Her parents were doctors, and they also studied medicine for eight semesters. Why didn't you become a doctor?

I already gave lessons during my studies in the Südstadt and had contact with top players there. One of them was Horst Skoff. And he asked me 1987 if I'd travel with him. It started with a five-week long South American trip. You like it with just 26. At first I just wanted to take a sabbatical, but my father predicted that I would be stuck.

Have you learned something in medical school that you can use as a tennis coach?

For a coach, a solid knowledge of the human body is certainly an advantage. And in case of injury or illness, I immediately know where to turn. I know a lot of doctors through my father. That, too, is certainly an advantage.

But do you not treat yourself?

No, I'm a long way from being a doctor. But for people who have to work in exceptional conditions-and there are top athletes-it is important to understand that holistic wellbeing has not only physical but also spiritual aspects. This is something my father gave me from childhood.

Sounds like your father was a good doctor.

For me, my father was the best doctor. Because he was not a Symptom handler, but a cause researcher. Thinking like this is important not only in medicine.

Your father died this year at 90. The book reads a little like a tribute to him.

That's it, too. I only noticed too late that my mother, who died 2002, is too short in the book. Of course, she shaped me the same way. But it is also clear that one has a special relationship as a son to the father. Often I still think today: What would my father have done in the situation?

Was he strict?

I've never been beaten. But a no was still a No. Also because my father has always considered a No.

You write that you were fascinated by tennis as a five-year-old-especially from the Plopp-Plopp of the Beats. Even today you will appreciate the sound of a clean hit ball. Could you blindly tell how it's going to be in a match?

I think so--when I know who's playing on which side.

You've been in business for a long time. Isn't there much going to be a routine?

No, but I'm naturally privileged. I do not know if I would have the same enthusiasm for the job if I had been working with only children or housewives for 30 years and knew: every Wednesday at 5pm, Mrs. Maier arrives, and then the Karli is on. I was fortunate to have stumbled on the trainer's ladder of success.

Horst Skoff, your first protégé, died in mysterious circumstances at 39 years of age. In the book, they ask themselves whether they are jointly responsible for his destiny. Aren't you too strict?

I think that's normal. In the three years that I was his coach, we had an extremely close relationship, the Skoffie has even lived with me-it is natural to ask if you have not recognized any clues. I liked the Horst very much because he was very different from me. I am one who questions everything, the Skoffie was

an impulsive person who could live out his emotions much better. And he was a giant tennis player, I owe him a lot: if the first attempt fails in this industry, it is over.

Later, you worked with Boris Becker, who was in a crisis at the time. The collaboration was successful, but was soon terminated. Why?

As a coach, you are not only a trainer, it also goes into private things. And because of my morbid ambition, I didn't realize that I had to give him a break. The time with Boris was a very important lesson for me: Since then I know that one cannot always enforce his own will. Giving up was always a weakness for me. But that's not true: there are situations where giving in is a strength.

After all, you brought Becker to second place in the world rankings in nine months.

Yes, but you are always challenged as a coach when you work with a player who was already good. Becker also said: He can play tennis anyway, what have you done there? Therefore, it is exceptionally fulfilling for a coach to lead a player like Dominic from the eighth year of life to the top ten.

For a time they have not taken any money from Thiem. How is that today, do you get a percentage?

We made a deal two years ago, but I'm not talking about that. Let's say this: If Dominic earns good money, I'll earn good money, too.

Quote Bresnik: "There is hardly a situation in which you would be dressed inappropriately in the training suit. " Are there situations in which you attract something else?

I don't hate to do anything else, but I'm not a suit man. And if you have 10 or 15 kilos too much, a jogging trousers and a further sweater hold an extremely pleasant g ' layer.

Günter Bresnik

The 1961 born Bresnik grew up in a people from Perchtoldsdorf family of doctors, but broke off his medical studies to make an international career as a tennis coach. He worked with Horst Skoff, Boris Becker, Henri Leconte, Stefan Koubek and Ernest Gulbis; Dominic Thiem built him up as a world-class player. Bresnik leads a tennis performance centre in the Südstadt near Vienna, he lives with wife and four daughters in Innermanzing (Lower Austria).