

THE DOMINIC THIEM METHOD

English translation of Günter Bresnik's "DIE DOMINIC THIEM METHODE"

I 'm not authorized to do it. My command of English is far from perfect. But I know, Dominic has fans not knowing German and this attempt is just for them. To be able to understand Dominic better. And I know, Günter Bresnik will forgive me not to have asked him for authorization. I would ask him if I was professional German-to-English translator. I'm not. I'm German-to-Polish professional translator. But most Thiem's fans not being Austrians are THE WORLD. And the world speaks English. That's the reason.

*I will translate fragments, which I'm believe are telling more than others about Dominic, his family and coach.
Enjoy (and don't tell Bresnik)*

I will translate as the time allows. This means, I will not publish the translation when it's done, but add daily so much I can. If interested, look here for updates. Or let me know via contact form to be informed via e-mail

PART 1

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"Go home"

In the summer 1997 a young man appeared at *Baumgasse*. Tall, slim, in the middle of his 20-ties. He told: "My name is Thiem Wolfgang". A tennis teacher, maintaining a tennis school in Wiener Neustadt, quite successful but this was long-term nothing for him. "I'm getting mad jostling with people not really interested for tennis".

He was interested for performance tennis.

I asked him: "*Do you have experience with performance sports?*"

"No"

"*Did you ever play any tournament yourself?*"

"*Only regional.*"

"Family?"

"A wife and a boy."

"How old?"

"Four"

"What's his name?"

"Dominic."

"My coaches are young people, who want to learn the profession. I don't employ family fathers. I don't pay a salary, which would be enough to maintain a family."

"My wife is also tennis coach. She can take care of our tennis school."

"Go home, please!" "Take care of your tennis school and your family!"

Wolfgang has shaken my hand and went away with lowered head.

I was not thinking about him anymore, but next day he was in the reception at Baumgasse again. Wearing a training dress and tennis bag.

"I had a talk with my wife yesterday. I have told her how much I can earn here. She told, it would mean a divorce. But she added, I can do it, if I need it badly."

Well, I like people, who are not brushed off easily.

Wolfgang turned very quickly to be my favorite coach. He was the first to come in the morning and the last to leave in the evening. He listened diligently to what I was telling him, how I was speaking with players and he was extremely good in implementing what I asked him to do.

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"Be quiet"

I cannot recall, when I saw Dominic for the first time. Wolfgang took him maybe some times to the Baumgasse and later, as we moved with the tennis school to the Südstadt, he played with Dominic regularly during his lunch pauses on a free court.

But I recall very well, what has impressed me first at Dominic. The boy could not stand quietly. Not because of being nervous or anxious., but because of violent compulsion to play. I have never seen Dominic without a ball and a racket., also when he was sitting in cafeteria or when getting out from grandma's car. When waiting for a free court to play, he was hitting the wall all the time. Even during a talk he was rolling the ball from one to other hand or balancing it on the vertically positioned racket's frame all the time.

"Dominic, be quiet, when Günter speaks with you" was Wolfgang saying. And Dominic was instantly standing at attention. But half meter further his fingers were secretly rolling the ball and turning the racket.

The boy was all **desire-to-play**.

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One day Wolfgang asked me if I could play one hour with Dominic. Of course I could and it was a pleasure from the start.

Dominic was running after every ball as he would run for life. When the basket was empty, he run to collect balls quicker. When I gave him instructions, he confirmed before I could end the sentence. And was implementing everything he was told to do, not only with visible joy but also with reliability and seriousness, for which he was evidently too young: he was then seven or maybe eight years old. This was really heartwarming.

Dominic 's ball feeling was not substantially better than of other kids with his age, he could not jump higher or run faster (rather the opposite – he was the lowest and finest among his age-mates) and he was not learning new things instantly.

But he had from the very beginning two extraordinary features. Those two features are the base of his international career.

First – he loved tennis like nobody else among all I have ever met. This was like this then. This is like this also today.

Second – he was actually not learning faster than others but – and this is the key – he never forgot what he learned. Each hour you could rely on what was learned an hour before. This was so then and is still today. The work with Dominic is an Eldorado for the coach. You can use

different skills like you use Lego bricks to build a house. I'm not aware of another player, who makes the trainer's job easier, than Dominic does.

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Principles of performance and success, I have learned over decades with top sports, are the foundation of developing Dominic to world class athlete. I do believe, those principles can be applied also outside of sport.

1. ***On the beginning you need to know the goal***
2. ***A wish is not a goal***
3. ***A good goal is ambitious***
4. ***To use patterns, you must analyze, not copy***
5. ***Learning starts when you admit you miss the knowledge***
6. ***Who has errors, in mind will commit them***
7. ***Don't break a rule before you understand it***
8. ***Performance does not emerge from confidence. Confidence does emerge from performance***
9. ***The success justifies every effort but not every price***
10. ***Cannot rule out failures. But you can handle them correctly***
11. ***Talent does not matter***
12. ***You can be really good only in what you love***
13. ***It's better not to work at all then to work wrong***
14. ***You can produce performance, but the success must happen***
15. ***What prevails in the end is the substance, not the surface***
16. ***The start decides about the success, not the end***
17. ***A charismatic personality must be first a personality***

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About the way of a champion

"To reach the possible, you must try the impossible" (Herman Hesse)

Dominic's success has nothing common with an incident. This can be explained by the fact, that for the first time in my life four basic premises were met together.

- The base of Dominic's success is his unbelievable love for tennis and the unconditional readiness of his family, first of all – his parents, to support this love.
- This made it possible to support over years the effort needed to reach world-class performance.
- I was competent enough to control and shape this effort, so to not waste it. I owe this my parents for growing me up the right way and my mentors. This is also founded on my experience collected on tour.

- The great trust of Dominic's parents made it possible for me to make some unconventional decisions, if necessary or apply unconventional methods.
- When Dominic was about 10 or 11 years old, I have defined the goal of our work: this was an image of a future world-class player. This image, consisting of different technical, physical and mental features and capabilities, is still an ideal, on which we are oriented in our daily work, 50 up to 52 weeks a year, five up to 7 days a week. Without any secrets or abbreviations.
- Even if this way to success may appear to be evident, when telling the story, it was rather weary.
 - Still teenager Dominic needed to forget about features, which made him successful before.
 - Dominic and his parents were required to survive years of losses and doubts.
 - Over years Dominic needed to go to his physical and mental limits to be able to resist to the loads of development.
 - Dominic could not allow to be satisfied with successes, which were coming later. He needed to invest the energy coming from these successes in the future.
 - Dominic was challenged and required to survive years of an illness. This illness was so bad, it could have ruined his career.

Apart of this illness everything went as planned.

Or actually even a bit better.

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The first milestone

Image of the perfect player

The goal we just set up was a collection of capabilities, which should lead to the success 10-15 years after.

Dominic was born in September 1993, we have met each other in 2000 or 2001. During these years the professional men's tennis has radically changed.

In 70-ties and early 80-ties big titles could be still won with patience and some tactical craft. Which was performed masterfully by Arthur Ashe at his last Grand Slam win in 1975, as he defeated Connors in one of most legendary Wimbledon finals. And by Mats Wilander at his first Grand Slam title in 1982. He played in Paris every ball with topspin to the middle of the court, one meter before the baseline. Desperate opponents were failing on the necessity to hit high bouncing balls far behind the baseline, without tempo, without angle.

This has changed in the 80-ties. Who wanted to build up his game on deficiencies of the opponent, had no more chance to be a champion. Because not only players were going still

better, also rackets and strings (Yannick Noah was in 1983 the last Grand Slam winner using wooden racket).

Who did at own will a step back into defense, was lost. More tempo, more athleticism. More aggression, to close the point also directly from the baseline: Thomas Muster was a prototype of a new generation baseliner.

In 2000 it was clear, how the future development would look like. I knew, which features and capabilities would ensure the success after 10-15 years.

A tennis match would get won principally by the player, who will deal better with tempo. This was the most important aspect.

The world-class player of the future needed to get control of rallies using the more and more important first strikes – serve and return.

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For a world-class professional player this means: he must love the competition. He cannot avoid difficult situations, but he must love to be successful in such situations. What media people call “pressure” must be something, he is eager to meet. Quite obvious: only losers don’t experience pressure in sports.

Such was the background when Dominic started to play tennis.

And the biggest rivalry of our sport was just starting. Dominic was 9 when Roger Federer won Wimbledon for the first time and he was 11, when Nadal won his first Roland Garros. Federer and Nadal opened new dimensions in tempo, control, bodily and mental fitness. They delivered tennis on the level not imaginable before it happened.

This made it more interesting, but not easier.

The second milestone

Three big problems

Dominic was an extremely successful junior.

But he got with each win deeper into cul-des-sac

Dominic was winning actually every tournament he was playing in. He has got first agreements with equipment manufacturers, promotions and awards. Being 9 years old he could win championship matches in the men's team of his club. He was seen among his age-mates as not-to-beat. Everybody was whispering about this "supertalent", which was playing that clever, tactically mature, playfulness, patience, fighting spirit.

First media reports about Dominic were written while he was still in elementary school.

At the same time Dominic's three basic problems were disregarded. Each one of them was big enough to prevent his professional career, also as profession in terms of finance – that is – to be at least Top100.

Moreover: these three problems were related to each other. They were preconditions and multipliers of each other.

The first problem was the double-handed backhand. All Dominic's shots were principally clean. Karin and Wolfgang have delivered an excellent work in technical basic skills of Dominic. His shots had a coherent overall look, just how it should look like for any tennis player. But the backhand did not fit in this image.

E real chunk on the leg. Blocked, awkward, the grip did not fit. His double-handed backhand was not a shot, but a push. But just this push was seen as Dominic's best shot, because he was able to use it to bring the ball over hours back over the net. They were saying "you cannot play Dominic to the backhand, he commits here no errors".

PART 2

And Dominic was winning, winning, winning.

But he was winning with mean tools.

Dominic was a moonball king.

The forehand was better. The forehand was a shot. Not faster than the backhand, but with pace, the forehand had a potential. With that one it was possible to make something. To make his backhand from those times a weapon would mean to change all principles of the physics.

The second problem was his playing attitude. Dominic was winning, winning, winning. But using mean tools. Dominic was a moonball king.

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The tennis player Dominic Thiem had a natural expiry date. The construction of his game would collapse after he meets opponents, which would not defeat themselves; he would remain on the top, also on the international level, until the age of 14, 15, 16.

But then his opponents would be bodily strong and technically skilled enough to play his slow balls back as winners beyond his reach, just like you wipe away breadcrumbs from the table. Dominic would end his career in despair being 17 or 18 years old.

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The third problem: Dominic's personality. Dominic was raised in high-grade conditions. When coming into some room, he was greeting people. He was saying: *please* and *thank you* and he looked into eyes of another person, when giving him/her his hand. Remarkably sympathetic, nice, friendly.

But too kind and polite for a performance athlete. Too much of a future son-in-law, not enough Skoff or Koubek.

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Dominic was exceptionally good in avoiding losses. He was not a type of a winner, he was a kind of no-loser. He was avoiding confrontations. When his colleagues were scuffling, he did hide away. His readiness for aggression was perfectly expressed in the trajectory of his backhand: max. 30 kmh at least 3 meters over the net.

When he apologized for a net roller, it was not courtesy but because he was really sorry for the opponent.

These were **the three problems to solve**.

To let it as is would mean to let Dominic win him deeper and deeper into cul-de sac.

The third milestone

Tools

The first main focus was working on shots. Serve, forehand and backhand are for a tennis player just like a hammer, nail and saw for a carpenter.

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Dominic was my hobby. An energizer. After a training unit with him I was leaving the court fresh and loaded with energy. Was for me a new experience. So far it was me who had to invest energy on the court. Training units were often – with Skoff, Boris, Leconte or Koubek – power acts, a whirl of persuasion, overcoming of the open and hidden resistance of the player.

Nothing of this with Dominic. No resistance. Pure joy. Commitment. Passion. Listening. Concentration. Attention. Desire to learn. He was done so he was no more able to hold the racket upright. But he was still smiling.

From the passion of the boy energy was emerging, allowing the hardest work on the court.

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And my task was all but complex. So far I was only interested in getting Dominic hitting the forehand fast.

On the other side of the net Dominic's father delivered balls from the basket and I stand near Dominic and yelled at him:

“Hit it! Hit it!” Hit it!”

He poked the ball and groaned from effort.

“Full ahead!”

The same each day at noon, 2 hours long.

Because of his earlier wins Dominic has grown a kind of a lock in his head, preventing full speed hitting. The only goal of this lock was to avoid errors. We needed to dismantle this lock. We were doing this by letting Dominic do only one thing – to hit the ball with the highest strength he was able to. And to follow-through so, his elbow was sliding at his nose.

For some time, I have even forbidden him to hit the ball into the court. I have asked him to hit the ball so wide out, it lands not on the court, but on the fence.

I have forced him to make errors. Always out, never in the net. This would be completely false for the development of his skills.

“Full ahead!”

...

Karin and Wolfgang (*Dominic's parents – PRF*) were not yet 30 years old as they took a big decision. If Dominic had to go seriously the way to be professional player and this was slowly showing to happen, this is for next 10 or 15 years the central point of our life.

When 12 years old, Dominic started to lose.

The fourth milestone

With one hand

The double-handed backhand was the symbol for short-term success.

We could reach our long-term goal only with a single-handed backhand.

When the lock in Dominic's head started to work, it was time to start to work on the backhand.

Finally.

The biggest construction site.

The shot was disturbing me from the very beginning. Every hour, in which I did not work on that, I felt guilty. Over months I tried to let Dominic play so seldom the backhand – each forehand shot was an investment in the future Dominic, each backhand shot – a fallback to the old Dominic.

The player in my head was hitting single-handed backhand like Cedric Pioline, Stefan Edberg, Arnaud Boetsch, Gaston Gaudio or Boris (*Becker – PRF*). He could use variety: topspin, drive, slice, trajectory, length, he could build-up the game with this shot. To watch the player existing in my head, how he hits backhand, was also an aesthetic delight.

The player, standing before me, hold the racket with both hands like he was going to strangle it.

I think, Dominic was about 12 when I asked him for the first time to get his left hand off the racket.

This was the golden era of double-handed backhand. Roger Federer was the only one single SHBH-er in the Top Ten, on the other side – Nadal, Roddick, Safin, Davydenko, Agassi, Coria, Nalbandian, Johansson. The double-handed backhand was seen as the shot of the future. The reach was shorter but one could hit back and control the high bouncing topspin balls also on the height of the shoulder or even higher. How difficult was it with one hand, one could see even with Federer and his problems with Nadal's forehand topspin?

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To accept only the highest tempo possible, to the point of exhaustion, was not my malicious mood but prerequisite for Dominic's outstanding hitting skills.

Because good tennis skills have no limits. Everyone world-class shot is a fluent and harmonic swing, free, without any limitations. In the best case it relaxes muscles like the racket was thrown to the ball. (A shot must be that obvious, that it can be performed with closed eyes. In training I ask Dominic often to serve with covered eyes.)

Delays in the shot are the basic evil. The movement is carried instead of being swung. The energy is blocked and misdirected. The control is lost.

Only a free swing makes the player able to control the ball when hitting with maximal tempo.

This freedom is most easily reached when the player is just tired.

The fifth milestone

The load tolerance

Even if nothing goes well: a professional tennis player must nevertheless be able to win.

That "nevertheless" can be trained.

It's false to create a nice environment for young players. Because they learn then to live and work in a nice environment. They get dependent from stable basic conditions. But the tour is not a laboratory. You are confronted here each day with new situations, weather, crowd, umpire, delays, different opponents.

It's a job of a trainer to prepare his pupil for this.

I'm doing this principally from my very first hour spent with a new pupil.

A player saying, he can play only on court 3, is guaranteed to play next weeks on court 4. Who thinks, his cap is necessary, will play so long without it, until he has understood, it's him, who decides about his performance, not the cap. A travel to the tournament is only possible, if daddy is also there? This is moving for me as a father. As a trainer I'm ordering travel ban for next three tournaments.

I know, many think, I'm arrogant and not sympathetic. But for a trainer it cannot matter if he is seen as sympathetic. His obligation is not to be loved but to get his work done.

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One of my most important tasks is to teach my players to win. To win even if it's going to be hard. When the temptation arrives to give up, stop to try, because external and internal resistances are too big, because "it does not make sense to make effort", what a terrible sentence. It's never pointless to make efforts.

Nothing is so easy as to lose.

You can lose without training, without effort.

The difference between winners and losers are the days, when it's just about winning **nevertheless**.

This "nevertheless" one must learn.

It's possible to learn.

It's one of most important lessons for my pupils. No matter, if they will turn professional players some day or not.

The word, I have used most frequently in Dominic's learning time was just "load tolerance".

...

Dominic was no more one of the best in his age category in Austria. He was no more good enough to be sent to international tournaments. But he was since long time my dearest student. Dominic was for me just like enormous, wonderful, perfect piece of marble for a sculptor – I could see this growing every day.

PART 3

It was unbelievable, how he remained not impressed by all grumblers and disbelievers, how well has he learned to deal with frustration and losses, how determined was he when following his way and first of all – how much joy was he bringing every day to the training. He did not complain at all no matter how he was "plagued", he never had doubts and questions about what we were doing.

The highlight for Dominic was to hit some balls with Stefan (*Koubek – PRF*). Stefan was doing this with pleasure, he liked Dominic just like me – but Stefan was an exception. As a rule they were hitting partners like this bald head 30+ hobby player, not able to win a point but could get the ball back all the time. Dominic’s task was not to do the same, but be aggressive, win points.

*“You get the **bald head** every day now. Until you kick him out of his shoes”.*

Over about two years Dominic was losing every day to the hobby player his two or three training sets. Or four.

“How is the last set gone, Dominic?”

“3:6”

“Well. One more. Go! I don’t care about the result of the set. I want to see you hitting ten winners, so the bald head does not touch the ball.”

Many coaches think, they should give their pupils hitting partners, who play nicely, regularly, with which you come easily “into the rhythm”. But I like hitting partners, who can exploit weaknesses of my players. And this hobby player was just toxic or a balsam for Dominic – depends of your point of view.

I even gave the bald head extra training hours to make him even more difficult for Dominic. His task was to be that annoying for Dominic as possible.

If someone can withstand things like this over years, how should it be called?

I call it **passion**.

A power allowing to overcome every resistance.

The sixth milestone

Aggression

Dominic needed to learn to understand tennis as a fight and to use his tools as weapons.

At the end of each training Dominic was a better player than on the beginning. And it all started slowly to get shape. The Israeli coach Ofer Sela – brother of the professional player Dudi Sela, who was training in my academy – had visited us once in the Südstadt (*part of a municipality in the neighborhood of Vienna – PRF*) and told a sentence, I would never forget.

“Günter, who is this boy there? He plays curious way. Not like a youngster. He plays mini-adult tennis.”

Dominic was then 14 or 15. He started to catch sight of people knowledgeable in tennis.

Ofer’s observation was right. Dominic’s shots were a real tennis in Lilliput version. The ball started to sound like it must sound when it goes away from the racket: full, grainy, a dull explosion (still a little one then).

Dominic has learned to hit the forehand not only faster but with more topspin. Players call it “heavy” – it’s technically very demanding but at the same time very effective.

PART 4

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Even if Dominic’s backhand is the more representative shot, everybody talking about it, Dominic wins his matches still with this “heavy” forehand, with the combination of speed and spin.

Tempo and control. This is what it is about.

When 14-15 years old, Dominic’s had first tools in his bag. Now it was time to learn, how to use them.

Most players need at this stage to have explained the court geometry, which shot is to use in different situations. For Dominic this was not necessary. The understanding of the game was developed enough in his very young years.

For Dominic it was about something different, more complex. It was to make him understand tennis as a battle. He should turn more aggressive, against the ball, also against the opponent. He was still a well-mannered boy, brought to the training by his grandparents or mum. Always courteous, always friendly. Nobody has seen him swearing on the court, he didn’t push himself and if so, then with an elegant “Allez!”, he didn’t ball his fist after won points. And he would never come to the idea to look into eyes of the opponent after a winner, to show him, who is chef on court.

But just the physical and mental presence of a player differentiates the world-class player from the rest. The really great players don’t win titles because of playing better tennis or being more fit than their opponents. But because they frighten opponents by their confidence, by the conviction to win a game anytime. The very special aura possessed only by big champions.

Dominic had a presence of a small boy.

And this was not because he was actually a small boy then. (Based on the wrist bone measuring we knew, he would be 1,82-1,88 m high. Everything over 175 cm was enough for the player I had in my mind.)

It was irrelevant, that Dominic was still not powerful enough to hit fast and controlled single-handed backhand. I let him hit the backhand so as he would hit it later, after being grown enough.

The same with the serve. He was instructed by me to go for the first serve with all power, no matter the opponent or scoreline, dead straight, without spin. What counted was only tempo, free swing, clean movement.

If he did just what I instructed him to do, it was impossible to land the ball in the court. He was about 20 cm too small to get the straight ball over the net and get it into the serve field, this was impossible because of geometry.

But also this was irrelevant. By far more important was for Dominic to learn to serve all over the match with the highest tempo possible. And this is someone can only learn when very young. Not first when he is tall enough.

“Thiem cannot serve” you could hear from everyone, *“He lands not any single first serve.”* Or *“His trainer must be an idiot. Why doesn’t he tell him to hit the first serve with kick?”*

Kick is the kind of spin, making the served ball to go over a curved trajectory to pass the net and land into the serve field. When I got to know once, he was serving with kick in one match, he got a rebuke.

Should I have done this differently, Dominic would not be one of best servers on tour today. At Roland Garros 2016 only Milos Raonic and John Isner were serving faster than Dominic, which made me especially proud.)

PART 5

That Dominic was so small and weak, did not matter. This problem would get solved automatically with the time. A bit disturbing was, that we had to limit the training load. My task was just to push Dominic always to his limits, but never beyond them. Our training was exactly dosed in terms of range and hardness, even if many outsiders could not notice this. Dominic was very cautious adapted to growing intensity.

The worse problem was his delicate mindset. Dominic was required to learn to prevail, to find the way, how to use his tools the right way. The best hammer is useless, if you don't hit the nail with it with determination.

With 15-16 started Dominic to play on the international tour for juniors up to 18 years of age.

I was only seldom travelling to international tournaments. Dominic was alternatingly attended by Wolfgang (*Dominic's father – PRF*) or by Thomas Strengberger, the former Davis Cup player, who was an excellent young coach and was spending lot of time with Dominic in Südstadt.

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Just after the match I was called by phone, not seldom late evening or early morning because of different time zones.

"How went the match?"

"6:3, 6:4".

"Not the result. How did Dominic play."

Of course, I started slowly to be interested in results too.

But what mattered most, were not wins, but how they came to happen.

"Listen. Wolfgang. Everyone must say, Thiem is stupid, because he goes full ahead all the time, no matter the scoreline. If this happens, we have it. This would mean, he goes for every ball full not because of my yelling, but on his own."

I wanted Dominic to build-up an aura like this: the dangerous Austrian with fastest shots. And of course, I wanted to see building-up in his head the conscience: nobody hits that fast as me. You can play so good you want. When I'm playing well, you have no chance.

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Away from the comfort zone!

I sent him to chop the wood instead of fitness training, I plagued him with arbitrary exercises on the court. I provoked him (*"the bald head did win again? What a pity!"*), I required his parent's to let him set the table home, to wash his clothes. I wanted to send him to boxing trainings, but he resisted (protest, good sign!), so I let him wrestle in the Südstadt with a training partner. On

the beginning this looked like exchanging tenderness between two teenagers. But some day it happened, that Dominic crushed his friend and held him in a stranglehold.

This is how looked our progresses like.

PART 6

The seventh milestone

The complete player

It was a daily struggling, for everyone.

The training work was going ahead without limits, forehand with fastest tempo, many hours, backhand with fastest tempo, many hours, in between the serve, with fastest tempo (training of overhead shots must be limited, also later for professionals because of higher injury risk).

In the meantime, Wolfgang was not only calling me by phone but also sending SMS with current scores.

I wanted to know more and more.

I was interested not only in how was Dominic's presence but also about a dozen of other players, which were under our radar, because they were able to play fast.

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Wolfgang was required to report in details. Was Dominic's backhand slice really the most beautiful among all those players? Had he the highest spin on the forehand. Was his first serve really the fastest, the bounce of his second serve the highest? If one of those players could do the same equally good or even better than Dominic, alarm bells started to be loud. And we knew, what's the next key focus of our training.

Dominic must not have been the best of his age-mates, but the more complete player worldwide. This was the minimal prerequisite for him to prevail against professionals.

Of course, it was clear for me, everyone has some deficiencies, even Roger Federer, one cannot avoid this in training.

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Late night an SMS from Wolfgang from Mexico. Dominic was trailing in the first set against some of the player being under our radar. I told him.

"Call me again after the set is over."

The next message was, Dominic lost first set. I asked Wolfgang to report the rest of the match point for point, like in a live radio transmission.

I wanted to know, how Dominic played every single shot.

I wanted to know, what the opponent was doing better than Dominic.

I instructed Wolfgang, what signs to show Dominic.

Finally, Dominic won in three sets.

In the Wolfgang's next phone invoice, he could find this conversation. 1200 EUR.

When looking back looks like a nice gag, but then it was a middle disaster.

Dominic's family was not that poor. His grandfather is a bank manager, his grandma – an architect – but his education did cost then between 50.000 and 100.000 EUR. This was in long term not realistic, even if I have decided not to take money for my work. I did not need the money that desperately as the young Thiem family, also because Dominic's younger brother Moritz has in the meantime started to train seriously too. And Karin and Wolfgang wanted to give him absolutely the same possibilities they offered Dominic. The double investment was paid by them all: Wolfgang, Karin and grandparents.

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I was hanging around the Player Lounge of Grand Slams and begging my old friends and fellow coaches, which pupils were the top professional players: I had there some stunning youngster, if he could please hit some balls with my pupil. Bob Brett was the first, who let Dominic play with Cilic, in Paris 2010.

On a side court Mats Merkel, the contract trainer of **adidas** was warming-up Fernando Verdasco, the a Top10 player. After some minutes I noticed, that Merkel was observing Verdasco with one eye only. He was more interested, what was happening on our court. Mats called me and wanted to know, who is the boy and when is his current equipment sponsor contract finished.

This way Dominic's name landed for the first time in an important notebook.

Part 7

I have succeeded on Grand Slams to get Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal hit with Dominic, even if it was only 10 minutes. Big experience for Dominic, also important because he could learn how it feels to be on court with a superstar, to live this very special aura.

But the most important was for me the feedback from the best world's players and their coaches. My goal was primarily to get this feedback, how was their impression about Dominic, if they found some weaknesses I could have missed. Their feedback was so important for me, that my dignity was not important at all. I needed to not fear to eventually nerve them.

I have squeezed Bob. What is the boy can right now. What is he cannot. What told Cilic about Dominic's forehand.

I was running after Federer's coach Severin Lüthi like a groupie: should Roger need someone for hitting, we are there in 3 minutes.

Some years ago I have recommended Gebhard Gritsch from Tirol as fitness trainer for Djokovic. Now I was begging him to do me a favor. Is it possible for Novak to hit a game with Dominic?

This feedback was so important for me, because I was the potential source of the biggest misunderstandings in our project, my eventual professional blindness.

I wanted to rule out the possibility to destroy everything because of a mistake, carelessness, a false struck against my wonderful marble block.

Bob's answer was *"You have a good boy there. Marin told, the forehand topspin was quite unpleasant. The backhand is beautiful, but here you must be patient until his shoulder and arm is strong enough. Be patient."*

I was kneeling around Pierre Paganini, the best ever fitness coach on the tour – working with Roger Federer and Stan Wawrinka – until he accepted to watch Dominic over 2 days in Südstadt. I wanted to know from him only, if Dominic is fast enough for the top. If he was not fast enough, he would have no chance. The basic speed is the only thing, you can improve in training only a little bit.

On the end of those two days Pierre told me:

"Günther, the boy is not fast."

One whole world collapsed in me.

But Pierre grinned.

“He’s as fast as an arrow.”

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At the Orange Bowl 2010 in Florida, Ivan Lendl was so nice to observe Dominic. He liked Dominic so much, that still during the match he called Claus Marten, responsible for tennis marketing at **adidas**. And Marten was expert enough to see the whole potential of any player. Dominic did not play well in Florida, but was somehow able to find ways to win. He had shots able to hurt opponents. He played always better when the score was bad. The small boy was able to prevail on the court. This has impressed Marten.

I was just rumbling with some friends in an off-road car from Nairobi to Kilimanjaro as my phone ringed. This was Claus Marten. Some minutes later Dominic had a global adidas contract.

The most of the money from adidas was invested in January for the trip to Australian Open. Dominic lost in second round after a frightening weak performance.

The eighth milestone

Campylobacter

PART 8

The eighth milestone

Campylobacter

It’s only thanks to a scrupulous and stubborn physician that Dominic’s career did not end before it really started.

In January 2010 Dominic was on a tournament trip in the Central and South America, five tournaments in Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru. Few days after departure Strengberger calling with the message, that Dominic got a diarrhea with blood, vomiting, he was in a dehydrated state hospitalized, including intensive care unit. Because of time zone difference I was to wait until late afternoon to receive an all-clear signal.

In Venezuela was Dominic still weak, symptoms were back and it was necessary to visit hospital again. But then a fast recovery. So good, that he was able to win his first two ITF titles in high category 1 and 2.

Affair forgotten, one medical control after back home – everything OK, can continue the training.

Nobody would think, that this trip could have costed Dominic his whole career.

Dominic was 16, soon 17, he started finally to grow and his body apparently decided to start with cautious production of testosterone.

In the growing phase the training with young players must be doses with more care than ever. They are more infections vulnerable, get faster injured, which means to take care about not going too close to the limits of stress tolerance.

But next tour trip to Asia was bad, Dominic was weak and could only win 2 matches.

Nevertheless, some weeks later he could win two matches the same day in Santa Croce, one after trailing 1:6, 0:2, the other after trailing 0:6, 2:5.

Media wrote about wins in Thomas Muster style.

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Dominic was after coming home (*from Morocco trip*) more silent than usual.

Principally he did never talk about not feeling well. He would always like to train.

“*Well anyway*” was always his answer, when asked if he feels well.

But this time he started to tell the story.

In Morocco the fatigue was back and he had bad nightmares. One could easily notice, how troubled was Dominic. He was afraid, something is not OK with him. He has fright.

I have reassured him, all these was coming from his development, hormones and he was treated again, he recovered fast, he was just a late bloomer, he experienced at 17, 18, 19, what others experience at 14, 15, 16.

So far then everything normal. Physicians were telling. And we were thinking.

Dominic trained hard, played well. He has learned to overcome difficulties.

In May 2013 Dominic called from Czech Republic. He has just lost a Futures final. 2:6, 1:6,

"I was not able to fight. Günter. I stayed only out there apathetic on the court, as remotely controlled. It's something wrong with me."

A day later Dominic was hospitalized in Baden. A friend of his grandpa, a certain Dr. Johann Pidlich, was there ordinary.

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Lots of analytics. And suddenly a rare pathogen from *Campylobacter* group was found. Some diabolic bacteria, offending intestines, exhausting the whole body.

Dominic had it in his body over three years, since that South America trip.

Three years long was Dominic seriously ill.

We owe this stubborn physician, that Dominic could continue his professional career.

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After 4 weeks he was discharged and was healthy again.

Some weeks later the win over Juergen Melzer and first ATP Tour quarterfinals, a challenger title, another quarterfinal in Vienna, where he was very close to beat Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, then ranked 8.

In February 2014 could Dominic reach Top100, still a junior. He turned to be a genuine tennis professional.

Since the illness to the Top100 it took just eight months.

How bad was he thwarted by the illness, one can judge only by his explosive development after the illness was over.

The tenth milestone

Part 9

The tenth milestone

Further on

*I have skipped the ninth milestone, because it is more about Ernests Gulbis than Dominic. Very interesting because Gulbis was a big candidate to com very very high. He had talent and all bodily and mental predispositions for no.1, but he missed discipline, didn't like to work hard. So we are going now to the Dominic's **tenth milestone**, the last in the book, but of course life is going on and he had new milestones every year, every year being exciting and bringing Dominic closer to the top. (PRF)*

By the end of 2013 Dominic was ranked 130. With this ranking the player starts rather not in Australia and not on ATP Tour, but stay in Europe, saves money, collects generally safe points in small Challengers. But because Ernests after strong season 2013, ranked 20. and Dominic doing quite well after common seasons-preparation on Tenerife I decided to take Dominic to Australia. He should to seek a challenge in qualifications for Doha and AO. This was indeed a lot risky because the perspective of small ranking pints number was about that high as the perspective of heavy costs, because the was a risk for many empty weeks – one is going to lose early but must stay, having only limited chances for training. Two arguments were – Dominic needed to collect some experience and Ernests would have a good hitting partner.

The trip was a real breakthrough for Dominic. He has qualified in Doha. He has qualified in AO, did play his first 5-setter in the career and won it against the Portuguese Top50 player, Joao Sousa.

New matches, including seven wins. And the experience, how close it goes on Tour. . The first quali round in Doha Dominic did overcome after trailing 1;6, 1:3 against the Italian Cecchinato and in the first round of AO quali – his first match in a professional's Grand Slam – he was on the brink and could get through with 10:8 in the third set. .

Should he have lost both matches, he would come home with zero points and 10.000 Dollars less. But he got 80 ranking points and 60.000 Dollars.

A bit later he was able to break into Top100 in Rotterdam, where his has qualified once more, could beat once more some solid Top100 players, the highly experienced Jarkko Nieminen and took one set Andy Murray with some rallies, which were gone around the world as highlights. At handshake one could see Murray to take a breath.

Dominic was winning respect, was noticed by many. In Indian Wells Dominic impressed when pushing Simon from the court, still the world number 23 and maybe the smartest tactician within the wider top of the Tour.

In Madrid the first win over a Top10 player, 6:4 in third set against Wawrinka.

In July was Dominic ranked Top50, reached in Kitzbuehel his first final on ATP Tour, at the US Open advanced for the first time into second week of a Grand Slam.

On the end of 2014 Dominic was ranked 39.

PART 10

It's almost unbelievable, how Dominic in so young age manages to be at the same time self-critical and confident. He expects from himself performance not only wins. He knows his capabilities. But he is more interested in what he cannot (yet).

At Wimbledon in July 2015, some weeks before his first title in Nizza, after the second-round loss to Verdasco he told me: *"Günter, this pisses me off. I know, that there is a lot more in me. I don't belong in the second round, I do belong into second week."*

Next days we were practicing how to deal with dropshots of the opponent. I have dropped balls one after other over the net and he was required to jump in and get the ball over the net from the wrist.

We have worked on volleys. He needed to stay on half court, his butt deep at his heels, the racket high in front of his face, forehand volleys, backhand volleys drills, smashes – over hours.

Second ATP title in Umag in July.

Third ATP title in Gstaad one week later.

Top20.

But the rankings position didn't change anything in our training, our direction and orientation. To win next match was less important than his improvement as a player.

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He needed to serve better, land more fast, flat first serves into the court. So we were practicing. For the second serve we have elaborated a variant, which attracted my attention for the first

time in middle 90-ties: on the ad court he took position not at the middle of the baseline but some steps wider out. To be able to use the wider angle with an extreme kick serve, pushing the opponent some meters wider out – opening the court for a winner.

Difficult. We have practices over weeks, months and years until I started to work. Right now is this a kind of serve, which allowed him to win half a dozen matches in spring 2016.

Dominic was just a Top20 player as he has learned a new return – blocking the serve of the opponent deep inside the baseline. The role model was Boris (*Becker – PRF*), this return against Ivanisevic, which allowed him to win the Masters title in 1992. If Ernests was not available for the training, I did let a weaker professional stay 2-3 meters inside the baseline and serve from here with all power. Dominic was required to stay 2-3 meters inside the baseline too. On the beginning there was often no reaction from him. But he learned slowly to read the ball toss – professionals can read from the toss of the opponent: the direction and spin of the serve – his eye turned quicker, the reaction time shorter, his instincts sharper.

In the first tournament of 2016 Dominic returned against Australian Big Server James Duckworth some first serves, taking balls 1-2 meters inside the court. Also, when scoreline was tricky.

On the grass tournament in Stuttgart later this year he was able to defeat Roger Federer just with this return.

The week with Dominic I liked the most so far was the week in Nizza in spring 2016, one week before Roland Garros. We both and nobody more, every morning at 9.00 on court. 2-3 hours training, focused on things, we have aiming for: clipped volley, high smash, direct shot to the backhand. The volley skills – you will not believe me now, but this was just like this, we have practices like 5 years old having the racket in hand for the first time. Dominic threw the ball himself with left hand.

PART 11

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This was a perfect week (apart from that after one day a French hitting partner has cancelled his participation for the rest of the week because of exhaustion). In the morning we work with such intensity, that other players and coaches are only shaking their heads. In the afternoon a second training unit followed or the tournament's match. Because if the match was too easy, like 6:3, 6:0 against Leonardo Mayer (ATP no. 51, year before Dominic's opponent in the final), then we added another an extra training unit.

Dominic won the final in third set against the 19 years old German Sascha Zverev (for sure future world's number one). Zverev did get fitness problems.

That Dominic would be not very fresh in the final, I have not only expected but even planned: I gave free days our physio, Alex Stober – the worldwide best in his profession, who works in our team since the beginning of the year. I wanted a kind of a boot camp atmosphere like 2 years earlier with Ernests. Only Dominic and me, training balls, training court, , matches. No massages, no relaxation. He should be tired, when starting next training or next match.

This week Dominic turned a better player. He has overcome the tiredness, bitten through, he has shown himself and his opponent his bodily capabilities. He has sharpened his virtues, just right in time before his most important tournament of the year.

And he could take his sixth title in the year.

After the final my fellow coaches came with congratulations, but still shaking their heads. *“How should Dominic win anything in Paris? Before a Grand Slam one must take care about his player”*.

I answered *“Let's see”*.

3:6, 6:2, 7:5, 6:1 against Inigo Cervantes.

7:5, 6:4, 7:6 against Guillermo García Lopez.

6:7, 6:3, 6:3, 6:3 against Alex Zverev.

6:2, 6:7, 6:1, 6:4 against Marcel Granollers.

4:6, 7:6, 6:4, 6:1 against David Goffin.

2:6, 1:6, 4:6 against Novak Djokovic.

Semifinal. Top Ten.

After the loss to Novak Djokovic Dominic told me *“I must be better. This loss is a motivation for me to work even harder.”*

He meant that seriously.

Dominic found his way of being aggressive.: to have joy in playing out his skills and capabilities. The stronger the opponent, the bigger the arena, the higher the expectations, the better. He goes through, because he can do things better than the opponent. And when he cannot do it better, he practices so long until he can.

Dominic is aggressive like a player in my mind. But at the same time: more sympathetic, heartfelt and emphatic.

This is the first point, where Dominic has surpassed the goal.

END