

What comes next for Nick Kyrgios is up to Nick Kyrgios

Written by Lisa Martin, Lecturer in Sport Psychology, University of the Sunshine Coast

Tennis pro Nick Kyrgios continued to polarise Australians this week with his on and off-court behaviour.

The 21-year old, currently ranked 14th in the world, has been at the centre of his fair share of controversies ever since he turned pro in 2013. Some of the issues have been related to racquet abuse, yelling audible obscenities while playing, Twitter rants, and showing disrespect to fellow players.

In October 2016, Kyrgios was fined and then banned from the tour for eight weeks for tanking (the word used for match-fixing in tennis) at the Shanghai Masters. This ban was then reduced to three weeks when Kyrgios agreed to seek “appropriate professional advice” from a sport psychologist at the request of the Association of Tennis Professionals.

On Wednesday night, Kyrgios was put back under the media spotlight when he lost a five set second round match in the Australian Open against veteran Italian player, Andreas Seppi, in disastrous fashion.

The match saw him unravel after receiving two code violations for shouting and racquet abuse. He was booed by the crowd as he walked off the court. This was most likely due to the overly casual demeanour that he showed, which at one point saw him nonchalantly hit a “tweener” during one of the most important games.

Understanding motivation

Once again, tennis fans are discussing what might be best to “help” Kyrgios overcome his issues.

In his post-match press conference, Kyrgios cited a combination of physical and mental factors as the reasons for his loss to Seppi. He referred to his body as being “pretty banged up” and also spoke of the need to take his preparation and pre-season more seriously. Kyrgios [has since pulled out](#) of his Australian Open doubles match due to injury.

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Kyrgios acknowledged that the mental side of his game was “a massive part” of the loss and went on to say that this is where he believed a coach could help. He said he was one of the only players in the top 100 without a coach and “that needs to change”. He said he has felt that he has needed a coach for a long time but stated that he “likes freedom”, “going with the flow”, and “being comfortable”.

His dialogue indicates that he is aware of what he believes are his main barriers, however, it also provides some insight into some of his fears related to taking steps to overcome them - a loss of his freedom and feeling uncomfortable.

Kyrgios's comments also bring to mind a key feature of the popular self-determination theory of motivation. According to this theory, humans have three basic needs which, if met by our social environment, result in increases in our motivation, our enjoyment of the task, our persistence, and our psychological wellbeing. If one's environment does not allow for the satisfaction of these needs, this will likely result in diminished motivation, psychological maladaptation, and potential poor performance.

[These needs](#) are 1. feeling competent 2. feeling like we have a choice (autonomy) and 3. feeling we have a connection with others. Kyrgios's use of the word freedom highlights the importance of the second of these three needs to him, that of autonomy – feeling like he has a say. However, it would be of interest to investigate the level of satisfaction of each of these three needs separately within his current daily training environment.

Kyrgios's level of maturity no doubt also plays into this situation, along with the level and quality of guidance that he both has access to and is open to receiving.

If finding a coach is on Kyrgios's agenda, then it's important he is able to choose one that he feels has a good “fit” with him as an athlete. If seeing a sport psychologist is part of his plans, then a voluntary session is always going to be more effective than a sanctioned one.

Along with fulfilling the more well-known role of assisting him to develop appropriate coping strategies to deal effectively with pressure situations, a sport psychologist could also provide him with further education in the area of coach-athlete “fit”. This “fit” should take into account a whole range of factors, particularly the individual's coaching and communication style and

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Kyrgios's preferred styles in these areas.

But whether it is deciding the extent of his future in the game, seeking assistance from a sport psychologist, enlisting the support of a coach, or none of these options, it is unlikely any solution will benefit Kyrgios unless it is his choice.

Lisa Martin does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

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