



THE PODCAST

## S1: E16 Leon Smith Supercharge Your Squad

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**Beth Stallwood:** Hello and welcome to the Work Joy Jam podcast. In this episode, I'm joined by the fabulous Leon Smith and Leon is the head of men's tennis and the Davis Cup captain for the Great Britain tennis team. And if you're an avid tennis fan, you will probably have heard of Leon before. Leon is an incredible leader.

I was lucky enough to work with him on witness his leadership first hand when I worked for the Lawn Tennis Association . And I really wanted Lance come in and share some of the things that he does around the squads that he creates and how he leads with joy in mind. And some of the things that Leon talks about in this episode are just really simple things that you can think about that you can do and it's a real practical example of taking something and doing your best with it and making great things happen. I really liked when he talks about the fact that no one is ever going to give you everything on your plates, is so true and that you have to roll up your sleeves you've got to do the hard work and you've got to be having the passion and be ready to be willing to learn. And that's such a great mindset to go into life and into work with. I really hope you enjoy this conversation with Leon. I know I really did.

Hello welcome to the Work Joy Jam. In this episode, we are joined by the fabulous Leon Smith, and he's gonna introduce himself in a moment. I'm really excited about this conversation. I was lucky enough to work with Leon for a few years and always been inspired by him and his approach to teamwork, to leadership.

[00:02:20] So Leon, over to you, we would love to hear your story so far.

**Leon Smith** Well, , my name is Leon Smith. , I'm currently head of men's tennis at the Lawn Tennis Association , as well as being the Great Britain Davis Cup captain. , if I wind back the clock, I started out, , younger years playing tennis. I was always maybe through my sort of teenage years, one of the, sort of better kids in Scotland.

And then I got to the end of my teenage years end of school and realized that I wasn't good enough to be a professional tennis playe, and because I've been playing so much tennis, I'd probably sacrificed a lot of the educational and academic, uh, requirements to go on to university. So my, my choice was at 17, 18 years old to go into coaching and I've been doing that ever since. And in the early days, it was very much grassroots coaching, working a lot with beginner level foundation level,

but I absolutely loved it. It gave me a good grounding. And as the years progressed, I got more and more opportunities to work with better players. I was developing good juniors myself as a coach.

And I guess when I was in my early twenties, I got that lucky moment. Lucky break opportunity, wherever you want to call it. And it was Judy Murry, Andy's mother that approached me, , to see if I would do some work with her, uh, 12 year old son, Andy. I did a few trial sessions in Dunblane and Starling, and we got on really well and that's kind of where my sort of journey into more of the performance and, and therefore afterwards professional tennis started. I worked with Andy for about six, six, seven years. And then, then after that I started work for the long tennis association and around 2004, I know different roles, different positions, and gained a bit more experience and, and was given an amazing opportunity in 2010, by the LTA to, to step into Davis Cup, captain and head of men's tennis, which I was very much surprised with at the time, I thought there was a list as long as my arm, that could have been better prepared than me to do it.

But, uh, I'm absolutely delighted though, to say to the, go for it and, and take that challenge on, from 2010 if we look at Davis Cup in particular, we were 44 45 ranked team in the world. , five years later, we ended up being number one, Team in the world. And more importantly, winning it, winning the whole Davis Cup, which is a world cup of tennis for the first time in 79 years and it will be no doubt the proudest career moment of my life , and something that I'll always look back on with, with amazing memories since then, I've continued in the role. We've, we've continued to have good success in Davis Cup, even more recently last year in the finals where we made the semifinals, as we have done twice since winning, and I'm continuing the roles to this day.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:05:32] Brilliant. Thank you. And it's such a great story, of yours to take something that was your passion, uh, as a youngster, that you worked on and then to work through coaching, you know, real grassroots, developing young players level, and then that amazing moment when you suddenly, you can only see this can't you in reverse. You can't see it when you're there. And you're taking on a player like Andy Murray when he's 12 years old. And then suddenly you see where Andy Murray has got to since then. And almost you would never have been able to predict that that moment would happen in your career. Right? You couldn't have seen that happening.

**Leon Smith:** [00:06:09] No, I mean so many things. I mean, it, it, when you're in that moment, especially when you're, you know, I was really young when I started with a young and Andy Murray you know, in my early twenties, I didn't really know what was going on. And I just brought some qualities that I've tried to keep with throughout all my coaching or, or leadership, which is trying to get the best out of people motivate, keep it fun, keep enjoyment high, , and learn and try and learn.

[00:06:36] And I had to really learn at that time to be able to keep up with the pace of that journey. And it was accelerating so quickly and it was, it was winning every world championships, every agent stage. And you just soaking in everything cause I hadn't been through that myself as a player or as a coach. So that was just, I was absorbing everything. But that's where your attitude to, everything's got to be so spot on that you you're ready to take that, that journey on. , but you know, if you fast forward from there, like you say, there's no chance of the thought it'd be never mind being Davis Cup captain, but, uh, a winning Davis Cup captain, would never have protected that when I think of it started my coaching journey.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:07:19] Yeah, and it is, so you have a career of so many firsts there don't you, and kind of being that person who's been asked to do that big job, and it sounded like you, you didn't necessarily feel like you were ready for it, but kind of really jumped in and went for it with all of the passion that you bring to it.

**Leon Smith:** [00:07:35] Yeah. I was really unsure at the start. I said no, uh, when, when I was first asked by, uh, Roger Draper and Steven Martin who are CEO and technical director at the LT at the time, and two people, you know I own an awful lot to, for, for giving the opportunity. But I said no, because I was, I was definitely in fear I was worried about what people were going to think, whether that was players, whether it was, the coaching world and even the media, for sure, because, you know, tennis is a prominent sport and we have a big tennis media fraternity. It was, it was definitely something that I wondered what people were going to say.

[00:08:20] And, and that's why that probably stopped me in the first instance. I wasn't thick skinned at the time either. I hadn't built that up yet. , I have now, but I'm pleased. I went to speak to a few people that are really trusted their judgment and had been a lot more experienced than me and they said, look, the team is at the lowest ebb possible it should be better. They've got players that just aren't performing where they should be. You can coach Leon. You might not have the most experience in the world or been there and done it and got the t-shirt. But this is where you can start and go and motivate them going in and go and develop some other things.

[00:09:00] Do it your way until then just help with people that can. Fill in the gaps that you don't have. And for me, that made a huge amount of sense, a huge amount. And I'm glad I went back and said yes, and they hadn't offered it to someone.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:09:14] I think the nation of Great Britain is glad you did as well with what you wanted to achieve.

[00:09:19] That it's really interesting. And we'll come on to kind of the team around you, the squads that you built and how you made it happen in a moment. But one thing I'm really curious about is this idea that there were obviously people who could see the talent in yourself and what you could bring and how you might go about building the team and making it successful from where it was.

[00:09:38] But perhaps you weren't ready to see the talent in yourself yet.

**Leon Smith:** [00:09:41] I think that's very, very fair with putting it, when you're, when you're starting off in, I'm interested what you think on this one, but I, when I was starting off on that, that journey, you know, I, I didn't have much credibility. I wasn't well-known so you have to really. You got to show a little bit louder and you've got to be heard a little bit more without being forceful without, you know, getting under people's skin. So you've got to bring your people skills and you have to show because otherwise you won't get noticed because people aren't going to ask you, you know, I don't know if that's the same.

[00:10:22] I always worked in tennis. So it's a very narrow industry. I would imagine. I don't know what it's like elsewhere, but I know how to show and really put myself out there more than people like being a very good player. For example, didn't have to, as much I had to.

[00:10:39] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:10:39] Yeah, you didn't, you didn't have your name or the reputation or the fame that, that some people have.

[00:10:45] And I think I work in many different organizations, different industries. And one thing I find is that when people are on their journey towards leadership, this the idea that you kind of have to be known and you have to have the right network and the right people have to be shouting and sponsoring you, and you have to get your name out there and a reputation.

[00:11:03] All of those things exist across most industries. There isn't very many where you don't have to make an effort in that space and you don't have to make sure your voice is heard and that you build yourself and that you have the people backing you in your corner. So definitely I see it work across many different, like working worlds it really applies

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:11:25] you're not the only one. This is such an interesting part though. So many people feel quite alone in that space and feel like it's only them versus everyone else has suddenly got some magic ingredient that makes it happen. And actually most people in the world really have to work at it.

**Leon Smith:** [00:11:44] when all said and done, you know, that. That is the fundamental, isn't it? Yeah. You have to roll your sleeves and no one's going to, no, one's going to give you answers on a plate and people say all the time, but it's true. You have to, you've got to roll your sleeves up and you've got to work hard and you've got great passion and you've got to be willing to learn all those, all those fundamentals ring. true. I see all the time. I see it. I see every day, I'm lucky to be around some exceptional people in their chosen sport. Whether that's Andy Murray, you won a contest every day and every day, they're just, they, they work hard. They bring a work ethic, they bring it a passion and desire as much about it.

[00:12:22] Then how much they've already achieved. You see it, you see it in them. And those fundamentals you need at every stage.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:12:28] Yeah. And it's not something that you achieve and then you're done. You actually have to keep working at it. There's another level and another consideration and more hard work to do the thinking about this and your philosophy and how you do things.

Obviously you took on this and people in the wide world, and if they're tennis fans, or if they know you, or, you know, anyone who read a paper, when the Davis Cup team won, they will have seen you in photos and they would have seen the team winning. And what people see out in the big wide world is this amazing glamorous shot of everyone with their biggest trophy in the world going look at this amazing achievement. And it's been so many years since the team lost, managed to do it, but what they don't see necessarily as the journey that got you there. And I'd be really interested to know, really focusing, maybe on kind of the team you put around at the squad you had, how do you lead a team to that level of success from where they were to where you got to, what was your method?

[00:13:26] And as it's the Workday podcast. How did you use joy and happiness and fun stuff to help make that happen?

**Leon Smith:** [00:13:35] That's it's, uh, it's a, it's a good, good question. I mean, there's many things that, that, that will have been into it, but if I try and you make me reflect, no, which was good. But when I think when I do think back to when I started, I was passionate, but inexperienced.

So I probably, I had a little bit of time actually, if I think, if you think about the timeline, I should go the role itself and in like April. Okay. And we didn't actually have our first match until July. So I had a bit of a period of time to go out and actually gain a bit more insight. So I spent that couple of first couple of months traveling a lot.

[00:14:21] Everyone thought I was just doing it to jet off to all these nice places. There was a purpose behind it. I promise, but I wanted to go and speak to the players who had been part of the team, you know, previously I wanted to speak to the coaches, personal coaches and players may involve people like being in the previous support staff set up coaching team and such.

[00:14:40] I just tried to gauge as much as possible. It was a lot of good stuff that happened. Sometimes good things happens and results don't happen. That that's also, so it's not all bad at all at all. And, and when I was, you know, speaking to people and gaining a lot of feedback, I could tell there was a lot of good things going on, but for whatever reason, they weren't winning, you know, they'd dropped down really, really low in the competition.

So the job then is to try and figure out why. Take the bit good bits and then make sure you understand what it is we could develop product. And one of the, when I listened to everybody, one of the key things, where could we, could we know our own players better? Could we have better relationships with them.

Could we understand them as people a bit more and not just coming into the team and try and win a tennis match, try and actually bond a little bit closer with them. So the first thing was getting really good dialogue, communication, spending time, building up a lot of trust with the players. The other thing is to make sure that there was so many areas that we could do better by bringing in other people other than tennis coaches.

[00:15:50] So. You know, making sure that we had, whether it was good nutrition, we actually had doubles coach at the time, a guy called Louis Cayer as well. So as a tennis coach maybe wasn't being utilized as much and yet doubles, but a huge part in our, our event. And yet that expertise, maybe wasn't being tapped into for whatever reason, but I wanted it because he was much better coaching doubles on me, therefore that's good for the team.

We also looked at getting the right characters to help and the support team and making sure, because you've talked about joy and enjoyment and fun. That is one of my definite key coaching principles. You know, making sure the environment is fun. Motivational. We energize the players, energize the staff, and a lot of effort goes into that.

It's not forgotten. And that could be things, whether it's team building, whether it's what a room looks like, what a locker room looks like, what a stadium looks like. A team uniform looks like everything was to energize and feel great about being in this environment. So those were, and, and from that, the culture starts to shift as those things you put in place, which seem so obvious, but there's some things obviously it's going to left behind and you start looking at some of the things you

may have to lay on afterwards into getting that order of what can really make a great team is does everyone get on?

[00:17:14] Well, that helps. You know, the respect, trust, care about each other. You don't necessarily always have to be the best of friends, but there's that trust. And we're lucky in our team. Most of it has been actually very close friendships and bringing good work ethic, bringing high levels of motivation, always giving your best, always whether that's due on the match court or whether that was you on the support bench always give you, uh, effort, best effort.

[00:17:43] And, and we really kept those fundamentals at the start. And we got those. I think we got those rights and whether that directly correlated to play a stock to win more. I hope so because they did start to win more and they started to get some, some wins against far higher ranked players, which is the barometer. Do you always be the players you should be? And they were starting to do that. And that's when we, we started to get, to get some momentum.

**Beth Stallwood:** Great. And it's so easy, isn't it to forget that the basic stuff, the fundamentals, the real core of teamwork is really important. And I think we often in business and in sport and in all kinds of different situations, even in our friendship groups, sometimes we forget that that doesn't always happen by magic.

And naturally sometimes you have to find a way of focusing your attention on something within that to make it more successful, because it sounds like you did actually have good friendships amongst the players, but maybe they didn't have the right environment or the right support or some of the other things that were really important to make it happen.

**Leon Smith:** Yeah, I do believe that. I mean, the camaraderie idea amongst a group of individuals that I brought together to operate as a team is important. It doesn't always have to be like a high fiving, you know, best of friends situation. It doesn't have to be, but it should be, it should be an energized environment, people understand how they're contributing to the overall objective of the team. Everyone should know where we're going to go. Where are we trying to get to? And everyone has a real feeling of value within that. Whether that's in my situation, that's in sport, whether it's a player, whether it's a coach or whether it's a doctor, a physio or a racket stringer, or it, everyone understands the role that they play and everyone very much feels part of it and, and it should be a feeling of an equal food thing. Yes. There's always going to be natural leadership within all. There's always going to be a star player in it, but it doesn't feel that way. It doesn't feel that way. It feels that we're all in it together.

One of the, one of the, one of the first things, uh, I did actually in my very first tie. I actually was, I always remember being very surprised in my first time. The environment wasn't that inspiring? Like, I didn't think maybe the stadium was dressed. Like it should be, it didn't feel like, wow, we're playing for Great Britain.

[00:20:09] I remember our locker room was like cardboard boxes where players were maybe filling the t-shirts out of it to put them on. And I was like, whoa, whoa, whoa, this, this should be feeling way more special. You're taking time out of your individual competitive weeks to come together, to play for Great Britain.

[00:20:25] This should feel more special than what you're used to every week. And that was one of, I invested a lot of time and energy with others to make sure we got that, that feeling. And I also wrote something down in terms of where we wanted to get to, just to get a sense. And I didn't really know what it meant at the time I didn't, but I had a direction that I wanted to go in how we were going to do that.

[00:20:46] We started mastering as the, the months and years moved on but I wrote on a flip chart, these words, which were what we were going to be. It was going to be a well-prepared team on a journey back to the world group, because it was going to take, , as being, I underlined prepared because that meant that everyone understand that we're going to prepare really well, whether that's physically, mentally, emotionally, but also how we look at our opponents, we're going to get good information.

So they understood it will get understood, stood that part of it. Okay. And then team was written in capital letters so everyone knew, okay, I get it. If I'm going to be part of this, I need to be a good teammate. And I put journey on there. I knew it was going to take some time. You can't just click your finger and expect things to transform overnight. It was going to take same. So I've put the journey on it to say, it's okay. We have time. And we're going to, we're going to be in this together for a long time, but it starts now and the whole point was to get back to the world group.

[00:21:50] So they knew they had somewhere to get to. And that, that formed a bit of a, a narrative of how we would operate.

**Beth Stallwood:** Great. And I kind of wrote down there what you were saying about a well-prepared team on a journey back to the world group has, for me, the preparation really comes back to that point of you have to put the hard yards and you have to put the work in.

It's not just going to miraculously change overnight, and that's the part of the journey, but also really focusing on that team, the team ethic, the team effort, how people work together, how you bring people in. And one of the things I was just reflecting on from what you said earlier, is this idea that you were new to it.

[00:22:28] You hadn't done it before. It was a new thing. You were learning as you go, you were thinking about how do you make this happen? And. A lot of people in that position feel a need or, you know, behave in a way that makes them feel like they have to do it all. They have to be expert at everything and they have to lead.

It sounds like you managed to resist the urge to try and do everything and to really focus on the squat that you put together to help make this happen, to make the team, and, and that feeling of the team all being equal, even if there are some stars within it. How did you do that? How did you find the right people and gather that squad together that really made the magic happen?

**Leon Smith:** I think, I think the first thing is it never felt like a, all what, an opportunity for me. I'm going to go on this crusade and everyone's going to think I'm amazing. I genuinely never have felt about things at all. I just wanted our team to do very well. They'd be a success so when your fingers on that pulse, you can, you can take a step back and go.



Okay and I think it helped that the fact that I wasn't sure that was the right. I knew I'd been given an amazing opportunity. I was, uh, I was a curve ball so my feet were very much grounded and it allowed me to go stop, check off. Right? What, what, what bits can I bring to this? And what bits do I really need the help and in order to help the team.

[00:24:05] There was getting a blend. You need, you, you definitely need your expertise because it can't all just be young, enthusiastic, enthusiastic, and passionate individuals. That is a massive part of it, but you're going to need a few people have been around the block a few times and I had certainly one or two of them, you know, we had a doubles coach.

[00:24:24] I mentioned before who's, vastly experienced in his sixties has won everything in the sport as a coach. And he was brilliant because I knew that he would tell me straight, you know, he's really not wave very straight talking to him in a good way would take me to the side and say - I think you've got to think of it this a little bit more.

[00:24:44] Or have you thought about doing this and the way you spoke to them, maybe you could change that a little bit. He was brilliant and is brilliant. It's still part of it Louie and I needed that, but then I also needed people that we're going to go on a journey as well. That had a lot of, you know, if you need to bring energy, if you're, if you really believe that by energizing people, you're going to get better performance, which I do then.

Then you get the people that have got the energy that have got the energy and the ability to energize others. And, you know, I can think of a guy, Matt Little who's our, our strength conditioning coach, physical trainer, who's in our team who also doubles as the trainer for Andy Murray. He has got this amazing ability to make people laugh, smile, work, hard, motivate, but just amazing.

[00:25:33] So it was a guy calling Colin Beacher who's part of the team that they have amazing people, social skills. So when you think about an individual sport, which we work in to galvanize, you got to put effort into that and it can't just be I'm. I think I'm good at that, you can't do it alone. It didn't take so much to fill a room with energy and then keep it there and keep going back.

[00:25:56] And especially after setbacks or losses, and you've got to pick yourself back up. [00:26:00] It takes a collective effort to keep that, that energy up.

[00:26:05] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:26:05] Definitely. And, having experienced Matt Little when I was in the audience in the crowd, he's honestly, you know, like the Energizer bunny, but like with double amounts of energy within him. And he honestly, he didn't stop once. It was like, he, I think he stood up for every single point and claps every single point on a three day full on thing. And you think, you think, do you know what, how, how amazing does having a cheerleader like that in your court make you feel when you're with that?

[00:26:43] **Leon Smith:** So you need to have people that are, that you need some pied pipers to start sort of a culture of, okay. I'm maybe not playing in that match. And we always have a thing that, you know, when we do a team either before we go out, we've done it for literally a decade.

[00:27:01] Now, since I've done this job, as you know, the bench, the team bench is set behind the court that are supporting and that's full of players, coaches, and support staff, like physio dot. They



will be as physically and emotionally spent as a player on the court. You know, I can tell that the older voices are gone, you know, it's like Matt Little you talked about

[00:27:25] We do ask them to stand up and sit down every single point to keep the energy. So when the player looks over, they see it, that we're with you, we're really behind you. There's a togetherness. And he said to me in which other environment would you ask someone to stand up and sit down and scream over and over again for about 10 hours in a day?

[00:27:45] You imagine how someone felt if you just did that and that's how they feel. And, and that's one of the things that we would be most proud of as a team, as you, I think we'd we'd have the best support bench across any other team.

[00:27:57] **Beth Stallwood:** Yeah. And the thing is it's catching, isn't it like positive energy is really catching.

[00:28:02] So when I was in the crowd there, I remember that Matt would do it and he would turn around and make the whole crowd, you know, the crowd stand up and clap and scream and saying there were drums and you know, all these kind of different things to get people feeling it. And that, that, you know, it's joyous when you hear a room of, you know, a massive stadium of people screaming for you,

**Leon Smith:** [00:28:27] it's an amazing feeling for everyone. And like, it's, it's, it's, it's great when everyone's winning, you know, fired up and can bring energy, but it's also when it's either tight moment or if you're going through a sticky patch, you're not winning in a match, then it can go flat.

[00:28:43] And yes, the player always has responsibilities out there to bring energy. But you've also got to, you've got to stoke the fire as well. You've got to try and help them find that especially with, of course, some of the batches we've been both been involved in, you know, one match goes on for almost well, it has exceeded five hours.

Some of the matches and we're supporting two matches a day and in the old format, what we were doing in Davis Cup, and that was sometimes 10, 11 hour days of, of support. It's very different to like, uh, you know, a football match two 45 minutes. This is like 10, 11 hours. You got to keep going. It's a huge amount of, of focus around energy and energizing.

[00:29:19] So one of the key things is that, you know, and I don't think it was always like that. You know, and that's the bit I look back at, it takes time and you bring in the right people with those values and those behaviors. And it's, it's infectious.

[00:29:37] If you have enough. And that's why it's not, it's not one person's job. It's about how much energy I've got. That's not enough. You need more, you need, you need a support and a team effort to get one going. And then it starts to infiltrate throughout and people just get that's who we are. It becomes how to be and who we are.

[00:29:54] That's what it ends up being. And if you don't do it, it doesn't feel normal. If you're someone that's low energy or a bit of an energy sap, you won't fit in you won't, it won't be tolerated. , because we are, we are going with energy. Yeah.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:30:09] And you, you set the standard for the behaviors that are acceptable within the team and you really, really stick to that versus saying, oh, it's okay, because they're really good at this they can be non energetic. Like, no, actually this is a really, really important part of what we do.

**Leon Smith:** [00:30:22] It is Beth. And I had to stay to a few players cause I get it as well. When it's an individual sport that might not be their personality. And I also get that, but you're not, never asking them to do something that they can't be or would not go inside care or not going performance by being something or not.

[00:30:40] But it's doing enough to be in line with the values of the team. And everyone has a different, , scale of what that might look like. Some are like, you talked about the guy, Matt Little he's off the charts in terms of what you can do. Not everyone, not everyone can be like that, but you gotta be enough to, to you're in it and understand it.

[00:31:01] And I've had to take a couple of players aside and say, look, I know this is, you know, you're not playing this match you'd normally be, you know, headphones on, in a locker or just doing your own thing, manual business. But I actually need you on the bench and I need to give your teammate, who's going to know everything.

[00:31:17] Please give them support because it will make such a difference if they see you supporting them. And we've got an amazing we've got Andy Murray, greatest sports people that have come out of great Britain when he's not playing it, he's on the side of the court. He's going bananas for the player that's playing.

[00:31:34] If he's doing it, I can tell you every player will, will start doing it. When, uh, when your superstar supports that we way he does from the side of the court.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:31:42] And you've got to remember that humans are built for connection. Like we're built to be parts of a tribe, part of a team, part of a squad, and actually that feeling when you can get it right.

[00:31:51] And you can feel that support from everybody, no matter what their status is. So if you're talking about this in the organizational context, you know, Andy Murray might be like the star of the business. Be like, if the CEO or somebody really senior, and you know, you, you know, the face of the organization, but actually this happens everywhere.

[00:32:08] And how, how do you find that way of just setting the standard of what it is? And you, you lead with enthusiasm and energy and fun and making people feel special, such an important thing to do to make the environment right. And make people want to do their best. And if you can set all of those things up, obviously through your example here, you have made it happen. And what I'm really interested to talk about next is kind of go on to the, so this is how you set it all up. You've got it going. You're working through it. You'd set that goal of getting back into the world group. At what point did it transition to we're actually on a path to winning this thing.

[00:32:48] And how did you kind of give that extra to make that bit happen, to not just achieve where you thought you might get to, but to really be the winners.

[00:32:58] **Leon Smith:** I actually sometimes find this quite difficult to pinpoint. , I mean, a moment in time where we, we started to be, to get a lot of confidence.

[00:33:11] I mean, winning helps, but we won a lot at the start because we really should have been winning. You know, we got a lot of momentum and people, it feels good to win, but when we started to play teams that were quite a bit better than us. Yeah. That's when the turning point came, you know, we beat one team Slovakia and they had two players ranked about 60, 70 in the world.

[00:33:34] And our, our two players that played in the things were ranked about 300 and we won that match and we went, oh, wow, that's a big upset. That feels good. And we ended up doing the same because a lot of the ties weren't played with Andy Murray, uh, he was off rightly trying to win grand slams, which he did during that time.

[00:33:52] And it was about 2013. We played against a very strong Russia team and Andy couldn't play, uh, again with this massive ranking deficit to make up and up. Our players, it was James Warden and, uh, Dan Evans at the time unbelievable wins to get us through like astonishing wins. And it was at that time, I remember Andy calling us immediately afterwards when we were in the locker room called my phone.

[00:34:22] And you could tell you it was so, so thrilled for the players and the team. And he's like, look, I hope I can still get in this team when, you know, for the next time, of course, yes, you can Andy you are in. You know, and, and that was our world. That was, he joined us again, after that, I think almost rubber stamped that things are going the right way and other players have proved themselves.

[00:34:47] And he, you know, he saw things were on the right track and that was important because you sometimes need that, that reference point from someone of that ilk that standing to go. Yeah. Okay. And I really, really really want to be a part of this now because. We have a chance of also winning it now so I think it was at that moment in 2014, we kind of thought, okay, we're we actually, in 2013 and we, we beat Croatia Andy was part of the team.

[00:35:14] We moved into 2014 back in the world group for the first time in like six years and, uh, that's when our journey started, we actually, in 2014, we beat USA and in San Diego, and again, we had another really good win. James Ward was 200 in the world, be a guy Sam Cleary who's like thirty in the world.

[00:35:36] I was like, wow, that's a good win. And Andy played again. We won that. We actually lost in the quarter finals that year to Italy. Uh, it was a really tough match and Andy played a bit lost Fognini in that deciding match, but it was. It was good for us because you asked me, what did we do when we lost that match?

[00:35:52] We hadn't lost for ages. We ended up losing that match in 2014 in the quarter finals. And it felt like a setback and, you know which is a good thing. Cause we'd gone from like 45 in the world to about nine in the world at that time. And this felt, this felt low, losing didn't feel good so we got together the night after we lost me and the players and we, we had a great chat about like what's brought us to this point to get us from 45 in the world to nine, what do, what do we need next year to go from nine to one?

And it was a really good chat and I still have my notes from it and it was about keeping the basics, right? Well, because we've gone so quickly, we try tried things because, and we piloted a few things. Sometimes we got a bit lost and we're doing too many things and it was all in good intentions. But we, we just, actually, it wasn't about necessarily some of the marginal gains we see in sport, some of the conversation was strip out some of that go back to really thinking about what we do well, but let's pick the best bits of the marginal gains.

[00:37:02] Let's pick the best bits so they can really make a difference such as what information can we get during a match that can really change something. What, you know, rather than doing loads and loads and loads and loads of research on opponents before we play them, that's fine. It takes hours. If they can get a bit complicated and what's more important is what happens during the match.

[00:37:23] That's a bit not because if you're, if you do all this analysis on an opponent, it's really good to have. Well, if the opponent's any good, they're going to mix it up on the day. You know, they're not going to do that. So you have to have your methods. So we, we really had a good chat about something like that.

You know, we, we talked about focusing on we talked about focusing on a tapering of the week so that you're ready and very, very fresh for the, for the actual match day. We actually did quite a lot of good, you know, we talked about being the best prepared team. We may have prepared a bit too much on the days leading in, right?

So by the time it came to match day, how much you've got left in the tank, that's when it actually starts. It's not like a crash course. You're trying to fill in lots and lots of hours, three, four days before playing Friday, Saturday, Sunday, or testifies that matches as well. It's about doing the doing what's needed what was the really most important things, but keeping it mentally tapering, physically tapering down the week. So you're right to really give it everything over the weekend. So is my point is we had a, we had a bit of a moment in time to go, right? What got us here and what can make us go from being a good team to the best team?

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:38:33] It's really interesting, isn't it? Because there's so much temptation and there's so many relations to actually in business and in corporate life and in all kinds of different industries here is that sometimes you try and put too many things in the bucket. And actually the best thing to do is to strip some stuff back and to go, let's really focus on what we're good at and our thing versus everything we could possibly do.

And it sounds like, well, obviously it doesn't just sound like it did work. And interestingly] enough, that whole actually maybe resting a bit more before the matches and before the weekend and finding some space and time versus over-preparing, such an interesting way of thinking about it. And then obviously you managed to make it happen and the team won. Talk us through that winning year and the, how you catch that because it's, so when you're on the road to actually winning something, which you were there, there's so much external pressure isn't there there's so much more expectation that there had been when you were in the 44th or 45th in the world versus 9th, and possibly they might actually get to the final or might get, you know, wherever you might get to, the pressure becomes so much more.

[00:39:41] And so many times in sport and in business and in everywhere, the pressure is actually what gets you versus, oh, you know, all the work versus actually it's too much. I mean, we can't make it happen. How did you manage to keep that sense of joy and fun and enthusiasm through that pressure? Through that actually, we might be able to get this and we might be able to win.

**Leon Smith:** Yeah, I think, , I think one thing we said, we definitely kept it joyful. We kept it fun. And I think because pretty much the consistency, some of the support staff come and go, that's not, that's natural. Of course the playing team can change obviously, Andy in the year we won, as was Jamie were absolute mainstays because they, you know, no surprise the following year, they both got to number one in the world. One is a single sport. I want a doubles player. That's an easiest team sheet. You can do, you put their name on it and then yeah, the others are fighting for the place.

[00:40:39] **Leon Smith:** [00:40:39] but what, what was good is that the other players you were going to make up the rest of the team had been part of things for a long time. So they understood the team and the support staff, the coaching team and the wider team, there was a few changes, but there was consistency. We were, we, we were good.

[00:40:56] There was a good togetherness. There's a good understanding of how we were operating and what was really important when we got to that year, we won it. We won our first match, which took us to the quarter finals. You have to win four matches in the year to win the competition. And we beat USA and it was amazing.

[00:41:11] You know, we, we actually went a lot of thought was put into where we went to the two Murrays much lesser extent, myself, Scottish, there's not a lot of tennis gets played. Professional wise, tennis gets played in Scotland. It's very much Southern centric, uh, in great Britain. So we felt it was important to go to Scotland and give Andy and Jamie, the Scottish fans, a chance to see them that that was the right choice as well cause they, it just brought a huge sense of pride and uh, more, more joy again, to be able to play that level of tennis in Scotland and give back more when, so that, that really worked well. , But I think what we maintained was we maintained some of the routines and habits. Good, good behavioral habits, such as making sure that we, we, we put in the week that we're, we're preparing, we're going to do some fun stuff.

[00:42:05] We're going to do some team-building and we're going to do, you know, a quiz night or we're going to go off and go and visit a football ground or go to a football match. We did a couple of times that year we did stuff that was just nothing to do with tennis. And it was more to do with that side of mentally tapering, emotionally tapering and having fun because the amount of stress that goes on and on a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, which was our max days, is enough to fill your boots for a very long time.

[00:42:34] So that the stuff before that was, we were very conscious to make sure, you know, one of the, I think one of the ties we, we played like crazy golf at the hotel. You know, you have to knock the ball into the elevator, press down into levels. So there's another course there. The rest of the guests probably couldn't believe what we were doing, but it it's just something essentially stupid it's just something to take your mind off. What's about to happen. so I think

**Beth Stallwood:** So you've got all this pressure coming up, you know, it's coming, you can get to the point of over, I would call it over rehearsing and kind of the arts world, but training like, and being there, and then actually on your performance day, it's not good enough.

[00:43:14] Or you can't bring it. Cause you brought it the day before. And the day before you weren't playing against anyone, you needed to win a game. So there's something there about taking your mind off and being able to have some fun and reminding yourself that there's, you know, that there is fun to be hard and then being able to focus and get in the flow and be awesome when you're you know on the court.

**Leon Smith:** [00:43:35] even when you're saying that they're, people can say, oh, you're having fun. You're not taking things seriously. It's not like it at all. It's not at all like that. You can have fun whilst you're you're, you're still, they're still giving best effort. It just doesn't have to be. I like what you just said.

[00:43:51] I think over rehearsing is a really good way of putting it because if you, if you, if you're thinking about this all the time, You, you are increasing the chance of, of overthinking of performance anxiety. That's not done, done the work, but the work's been done before. So you're leading into something that ability to, you know, you've got to think about what your, your energy tank is like both emotionally and physically.

[00:44:19] And you think you just, you know, that petrol gauge or whatever, where is it? Where does it when you really need it? I'm not going to sell for a long journey with like, not much fuel, left in the tank. You know, I've got to really think about where I'm in that and that's getting good rest, good sleep, good food.

[00:44:34] The, the, the, the, the mind feels you know, in a good place. And we, we have one, you know, people talk about philosophy that always again, when people ask that philosophy is find it quite difficult to say, it's, it's this, this, and this, because they kind of change and a little bit of evolve with the thing about fun and motivation that always stays, but that's more of a, how I am and how I deliver.

But one of the forces that we have had in place, or is that a methodology you can tell me afterwards is, you know, we, we go always person first performer second, and then tennis player third. And that has always remained. And we use that. Definitely not just the Davis Cup. I use it in my own leadership team. I use it with players in their own teams. I use it, the younger players, developing players, he's it in family, the same. I go person first. How are you? How's your health? How's your wellbeing? How's everything at home. How's your family treat the players at that? I mean, when they come into Davis Cup, that's what we do.

We check how they are.

[00:45:47] **Leon Smith:** Human massively, because what's the point. If I haven't checked that out, we're going to get to the next stage of the performer, the performers and our worldly head height and legs, we call it, which is the head is like your ability to focus, to concentrate, to make good tactical strategical decisions.

The heart is, are you ready to fight for every point? You know, are you really there to, to unconditionally compete, and the legs are, you know, how physically fit are you? You know? Are you, are you in a good place, but you're not counting any injuries. You're ready to last a five hour match if needed.

[00:46:22] So, but there's no point in going to that bit. If then if there's something going on at home, there's not the I'm gonna be able to get them to perform something's going on in their life. So that's the flow of it. And then right at the end of that, we can, if we work through the performer and they're motivated, they're ready to go.

[00:46:39] Ah, okay, right now, will we make, tell you where to hit your forehand in that match? Maybe we might tell you what to serve that, but that's something that we see as a philosophy and methodology. That's what we've, we've managed to stick to.

[00:46:52] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:46:52] It's a, it's a great philosophy to have, and again, linking it back to different businesses and different industries and different types of work is that I honestly believe if we can get back to having a human conversation before we have a work-based conversation before we have, Hey, this is your job based conversation and how you can improve in your job.

[00:47:09] I think the world of work will be a much happier, more joyful place because you're absolutely right. How, how can you have a conversation with somebody about how they might need to improve something in their role? If what's going on at home is taking up 99% of their brain. It's just not going to work.

[00:47:25] It's going to be a failing way of working. So I it's so important. I really love to hear it in that way and described in that way. So obviously you then, as a team, went on to win and the joy of winning and itself must have been incredible. And to have like the crowd around you and, you know, the country really well, uh, you know, four countries, the whole of great Britain behind you and being amazed and impressed and so proud.

It's interesting though, because rather than talk about the winning bit, cause I think we all know what winning feels like and how amazing it is, is what happens after that. How do you keep the joy and interest when you think, oh, we kind of want it now? What happens next?

**Leon Smith:** [00:48:09] Yeah, it's I, I was, uh, the support team really thought about that.

Once, once the, the winning dust had settled and, you know, we, that was five years ago that the winning happens, , and we've had many, many goods, uh, moments since then many, but the winning moment, you know, we. We had all the accolades, you know, there's about 8 billion people watching on TV. We went straight to a few days later, we were in Downing street with the trophy with the prime minister.

[00:48:43] We, we, we won the BBC sports personality team of the year. And in there, you know, massive, you know, seven or 8 million viewers, again, watching that thing and having to give a live speech that was, that was, uh, performing under pressure. I can tell you that much, you know, we had an amazing time, but you know, very quickly, our next tie actually was planned and it was in, I think it was February with this we'd won in end of November, end of November. And we already knew were playing Japan in Birmingham and in mid to late February. So there wasn't that much



time, but you have to go again. , but the feeling was. I remember talking to people, how's this going to feel? And the, I ended up you make sure you make sure it still feels special.

[00:49:34] It still feels, it still feels different. Maybe not better. Cause that's not fair. It feels different to what they're doing every other week. So you just make sure that you are still, you know, look around if we've got the right people. Is everyone else still as passionate as I feel as a players feel once you got used to that.

[00:49:50] Okay. But that's good to go. No need to change that. Check everyone else's motivation. Is there, check that the next environment's going to feel special. So we did things like we're the winning team coming out and making sure we do something special in the first match we had fire flaming things on the court and amazing spectacle, light show, that sort of thing.

[00:50:10] We made sure, you know, the hotel was right. We, we actually built an even better team room. You know, it was like, wow, we had even better things that we could hang out as a team or a better, you know, the, there wasn't a table kind of different things going on. We did some different activities. We just had to just make sure that you're ready to go again and it feels that you really are, but then we, we really didn't have an issue with that following year. We might've been actually one of my regrets and that we, we really, I really feel we should have won it two years running, you know, we'd wait 79 years and we'd go to the semifinals again the following year, uh, which was amazing. , we ended up losing to Argentina.

You know, it was a five-hour match in that one. When the guy, when Martin Del Potro beat Andy in one of the most amazing Davis Cup matches of all time. And it went down to the final match. We lost, I think, a good one with a one or two years in a row. It's been an even more amazing story, but we started to get grittier.

[00:51:14] That's, that's the thing we were getting good success. And, but I think it's the team. It's the team. That keeps, you know, you need to play us to return. You need to play, to keep committing to it, wanting to be part of it. And if it, if it feels like a great environment and something they're going to enjoy, because that's what it is that they enjoy it.

[00:51:37] And that's why I always come back to, tsort of too long an answer for your question. I'm sorry, but you're making me think about it. I go back to making sure it's a really uplifting environment, then they'll want to come back into it. It's a good break from what they do normally. And to come back into something that really lifts them.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:51:55] Yeah, it really sounds like that going back to your core principles of what is this about and not resting on your laurels and going, oh, hang on where the winners, now we can just kind of make it happen or just glide along and asse that everything will be great. It's saying actually, no, we need to make it special.

[00:52:10] We still need to make it feel great. It's not that we're winners forever. Now that we've done it, but we need to keep working. And another example, isn't it, of how the hard work just still has to continue. It doesn't it doesn't stop just because you won.

[00:52:24] **Leon Smith:** [00:52:24] no, it doesn't, it doesn't stop yeah. To remember as well we're dealing players are doing this week in week out, they're trying to win every week. They want to win.

They want to be successful. So they're already a very motivated group of individuals that we're harnessing into a team and I'm sure that's the same in NBA, you know, there's similarities across different industries by now.

[00:52:49] You know, they, they want the opportunity to showcase what they can do they like playing in front of crowds that motivates them. There's a whole, yeah, it never stops. And I haven't I've yet to I've yet to I've yet to be part of a, a Davis Cup week where it's felt a bit flat. I was actually, I was aware of one moment we were playing, we were playing, it was Uzbekistan about two, three years ago that was a playoff match to go into a new format of the finals. But it was, it was, it was tough. They didn't have any star named players. And we're playing back in Glasgow, you know, Andy wasn't playing with a few other players out. We could tell it was going to be quite tough to sell tickets.

[00:53:41] I was kind of like, whoa, that was a bit of a feeling of this could be a little bit flat for the first time. So we tried to look at a different angle to put things in the week that we'd just change it up disrupted a little bit. So for example, we came up with an idea and to get 3000 school term and under-priced deprived areas from Glasgow into what, to one of our practice sessions on the Wednesday.

[00:54:11] So we'd like a 9,000 seater stadium. It was amazing, but 3000 kids then and we did a practice session. We did some fun stuff. We're hitting tennis balls into the crowd that they caught, we got the t-shirts, they go flags to go. Uh, it was, it was brilliant. And the players that we had not done that before and, you know, a sense of pride of giving back from the players involved and that was amazing, kids were screaming was so happy. And so you have to find other ways if you, if you send something it's again, it's just having a radar up to what can we do here? And giving back to our community is definitely something that, that, that gives that sense of togetherness and play again.

**Beth Stallwood:** Yeah. So if you, if you feel the dip and it's, you can feel, it can't be somebody, you can feel like this is coming and you can feel it when you're in business. Like there's a team. That's not, that's been amazing, but as a bit, maybe tied out or something's not quite right, or a project isn't going so well, it's about, you have to do something to disrupt it, rather than let it fester or let it continue on.

And, you know, great example there of actually giving back and reminding people how, uh, how much fun it is and how it's something that, you know, sport is an amazing thing for drawing communities together and making kids happy and all of that amazing stuff. I could honestly, Leon talk to you for hours and hours more and pick your brain on how to be an awesome leader forever.

What I'd love to finish off with, if it's okay to ask you some quick fire questions

I'm going to hit you a tennis ball, but as you know, you see my tennis skills are not that good. So it's probably going to go off in some random direction so first question for you personally, what is always guaranteed to bring you some joy at work?

[00:55:57] **Leon Smith:** Uh, the people around me energy and energize people around me.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:56:03] Great. So totally within your theory, your principles, how you work is bringing the energy and people around you who can make that happen. Love it. What book are you currently reading or would you recommend to our listeners?

[00:56:17] **Leon Smith:** [00:56:17] That's a, that's a good question. I'm not actually much of a big reader. Okay. So a more, a more podcast based.

[00:56:25] However, what I have started doing in the last Six to eight weeks as part of a development program on myself, the person that's mentoring me, , has got me every weekend, buying the weekend edition of the financial times and I I'm actually really enjoying it. So I am spending my weekends doing that. And then coming back into work with all these amazing different viewpoints and stories that people don't understand how I'm coming out with them. If people aren't, uh, getting the financial times weekend edition, I recommend it.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:57:06] Something different to maybe what you would usually read.

[00:57:27] It's brilliant as white, very agreed that we'd normally delve into.

**Beth Stallwood:** [00:57:32] Brilliant. And, , as you're into the podcasts, what podcasts would you recommend?

[00:57:38] **Leon Smith:** [00:57:38] It depends. It depends what people's tastes are mine are human performance, uh, or like I love football. So I listened to any podcasts has got football on it and if you've not, if I can persuade people to, uh, slightly dive into tennis and then check out The Tennis Podcast is, is probably one of my go-to

[00:58:03] **Beth Stallwood:** And next question is what's the best or best useful bit of advice that you've had in your career in life. It doesn't have to be career base that you always come back to to help guide you in situations.

[00:58:20] **Leon Smith:** [00:58:20] I can answer that quickly surrounding yourself with, with positive people. So it's still in line with what I talked about.

Judy Murray told me that a long time ago when I worked with her and Scotland on, uh, on, uh, on the tennis program, the national program there, and I've kept it ever since. So I'm always aware of who I surround myself with

[00:58:40] **Beth Stallwood:** Such great advice. When you're thinking about how do you build a squad around you is the positive people will, will help make that happen.

[00:58:48] **Leon Smith:** [00:58:48] Yeah. And also just on that, I mean, I really, it's amazing. You can have eight energized people and you know, that one energy sap, it just, it can stop you in your tracks. It really can. And so I'm always aware of just so I end with positive, positive energize people.

[00:59:14] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:59:14] Uh, not the mood Hoovers

[00:59:19] Final question for me, what is one really practical bit of advice that you could give our listeners? Something that they could maybe just go and do really simply nothing too complicated

that they could do today, tomorrow the next day that you think would help bring them more joy in their work, whatever that work may be.

**Leon Smith:** [00:59:38] Uh, that's a good question. I mean, you could do this either yourself or maybe even more, more enjoyable with a team maybe is sometime, I mean, everyone does this sort of checkpoints review points and whatnot, but I, I do a lot because everything moves with such pace that I'll get to go with my, my team that I work with national coaches, , and we'll just very openly have three questions that we reflect on.

That is what are we doing well as a team? Uh, what are we finding either challenging or frustrating as a team? And then the third one is what are we going to do about it, what we're going to do about these things. And I like, as I've tried to do it more and more, I think it's, uh, I'm finding things, you know, life's always like that, but if things changed so quickly, , we didn't know what was happening with the pandemic.

[01:00:38] So it changes things like your resource and what you can allocate from your resources and who's doing what so, and everyone's circumstances, situations change. It's good to just check and I like to see questions. So I, I think that's a good starting point.

**Beth Stallwood:** Great three questions and that kind of reflection on where you are understanding what's good, what you need to work on.

But most importantly, and I love that last part. Cause I'm all about the action is what are you actually going to do about it? So we don't just get stuck into that discussion and debate side of things. You actually get on to doing something, to make it better, improve it, to, to keep it working in the way you need it to work.

[01:01:15] So great to have that action one there, Leon, thank you so much for joining us today. It's been a great conversation and your philosophy, how you think about things, your methodology, whichever one you want to call it. I think it's a great way and always remember that human first factor and then move into the performance and the playing and make it happen.

Such great advice for everybody before we finish off, where can people find out more? Is there any way they can follow you and see what you're up to?

**Leon Smith:** I mean, I'm on Twitter. I wouldn't say I'm the most active across Twitter or on Instagram, more on, on, on Twitter. People wanna search me. They'll certainly find me on there.

I'm not really are not one for, for posting or showcasing what I'm up to, but if you go on Twitter, you got a flavor of, of, of what I'm up to, uh, on a sort of weekly basis. Otherwise I'm on a tennis court leader, leading tennis or talking about tennis.

**Beth Stallwood:** [01:02:20] So, so, so get onto watching some tennis and we'll see you on the sidelines, cheering, Leon. Thank you so much for joining us today. It's been fantastic and I have to talk to you again soon.

**Leon Smith:** Great. Thanks very much, Beth. I really enjoyed it. , and good luck with everything.

**Beth Stallwood:** And thank you for listening to that conversation with Leon. I know there's so many great bits of nuggets and advice to take away that I find it hard to pick one thing, for today's days, episode, but I just think this idea that getting the right characters in to help make the support team really work in whatever you're doing, making sure the environment has some fun, making sure it's motivational, making sure it has got energy behind it.

[01:03:13] And I really love this idea that. Those people come be both hired for that technical brilliance of what they do, but also the attitude, the energy that they bring to the team as well, and such an important thing to think about when we're pulling teams together, when we want to achieve great things and great advice from someone who's been there, done it, built a team and made it so successful.

[01:03:40] Thank you very much for listening to the Work Joy Jam podcast today. There are other episodes available, so do go and have a listen, there's lots of different people with different expertise, different perspectives, different backgrounds, and I hope there'll be something in that to inspire you. We would love to hear what you're doing.

So do let us know either on LinkedIn or on Instagram, both of them are @createworkjoy. Tell us what you're doing. What inspiration have you taken? What actions are you taking away? To create and cultivate more joy in your personal working life.