

Mental Skill Development In Training

Composure and Coping

I regularly set up training sessions where a player(s) were behind with a limited number of ends to play and they were behind on the scoreboard. The intention was simple, plan how to win and cope with the situation.

Sometimes I had a team given the jack down 8-11 with six more ends to play and observe how they set about winning. (Conversely I watched and observed how the winning team set out to maintain their advantage.)

What I watched out for was the behaviour of every member of the teams to see what level of coping was obvious to me, the spectator.

A catchphrase I used was:

Lose your temper
Your team
Your plan
Your game
Your mental skill

What I wanted to explore after every one of these six-end sessions was the degree of application the players could develop to cope with supposed pressure.

Pressure: really what is it?

Ask a variety of players and spectators for that matter and sure enough you will get numerous answers.

For example, one international singles player described his pressure in competitive situations when neither of his first two deliveries ended within the head.

So how do you train for that situation, as it will arise in competition because that is how he first felt pressure?

My remedy for that singles player was to only allow him to have two bowls and play a game against an opponent with four bowls in training.

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And some of the times the opponent was allowed to walk up and place two of his bowls in the head close to the jack further heightening the emphasis on the bowl deliveries still playable.

The object was:

- To familiarize the singles player with a situation wherein he was in defence mode being two shots down to start.
- To enable him to realize he still had control (and skill) to deliver two more bowls to impact on the score.
- To use these training sessions so as to take the 'recall button' into competition whenever a familiar situation arises to that in which we trained and prepared for such an event.

And I videoed all this to reinforce the singles player's control of mind and emotion was actually with the deliveries he still had in his hand ready to deliver.

I read a great book called 'Death Sentence: the death of public language' by Don Watson which is a book totally unrelated to bowls or sport for that matter, but one sentence he described hit me.

His book describes the use of language and how words are the valuable tool, more so than grammar. I liked his focus on words as a reflection of our imagination, like good coaching. I especially reacted to his use of the word pressure, familiar to all of us in sport.

Watson spoke of 'being under pressure' and suggested it should read 'being under siege'. I saw the value of his word as it applied to pressure – should we not say we 'face pressure' rather than 'being under pressure'.

What a revelation in the more appropriate use of a word, replace 'under' with 'face' and you exude a whole different mindset. 'Under' implies losing or lost to me, weighed down; whereas 'facing' gives me an impression of standing at the same height as the perceived pressure; generally don't we all feel we face all things better if we face them head on.

So next time choose under siege when the proverbial is really hitting that fan, otherwise look out and there facing you eyeball to eyeball is, you guessed it, pressure.

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Invite 'him' in why don't you, and enjoy the challenge.

Lachlan Tighe, 2018