

How do you deal with toilet breaks

I had a question put to me regarding when is best to take a break during singles and how best to refocus for the next end.

The story from the player:

I played singles yesterday and found that I was keeping fairly level with my opponent (a couple of shots difference). I got the call from nature and I wondered how to best time the break (weak bladder) and then refocus to continue where I left off. I've noticed this has been a bit of a pattern for me in singles matches with the next couple of ends often resulting in inconsistent bowls, often resulting in me dropping shots.

I wondered how you might advise someone on this situation and whether the members of your squad have had to deal with this issue and any suggestions they may have? I realize it might be as simple as making sure to refocus properly, but I just wondered if anyone had any tips?

Thanks

Response:

I remember Jamie, you took a break in the state singles because an opponent was getting app your nose, correct?

When I coached Lina from Malaysia what she did, if she had to go for the toilet break, is take that time to reinforce what she needs to do, continue to do, as soon as she started her walk back toward the green.

I like stats for that reason, as you can have a glimpse of what you recorded and get yourself back on track.

Another thing may be to walk around a bit more behind the mat when the opponent is bowling to energize yourself back into the heat of battle.

Anyway let's see who else has a view on the issue.

(1) Hi Lach,

Personally I don't use toilet breaks tactically. Whenever an opposition uses this against me (which happens A LOT!) in an obvious way it only bolsters me with confidence. I see it as ultimately someone saying that they can't find any other way to beat me on the green.

Back to your question though. Interruptions in play that throw you off your game (even if caused by yourself). This is something I've worked hard at improving over the years. When I first started playing pennant there was an enforced 15 min tea break (back when it was 25 ends) and everyone would sit down, have a cup of tea, a sandwich or scone with jam & cream and the president would give a "welcome" speech to the visiting clubs.

The club I bowled at was notorious for being up at the tea break and invariably losing the first five ends after the tea break to end up snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. It took a long time for me to get out of this bad habit.

Different things work for different people, but here are some tips I have (and use):

- Don't rush. Sometimes trying to rush to get there and back will put you off your rhythm.
- Mind the gap - Be careful about what you are thinking about during the interruption. This article explains it best. It's about cricket which is similar to bowls in that there is a lot of "in between" actual play. <https://www.espnricinfo.com/story/martin-crowe-on-the-importance-of-the-gaps-between-balls-786989>

Relax a little bit if your level drops off for a bowl or two. This can happen even without the interruption. Put all of your focus into the next bowl and forget any previous bad bowl played.

As Lach stated in another email, bowling at 50% or above Mat Length efficiency is considered a good standard... This means that the other 50% of your bowls (or hopefully less) weren't at that standard, but we still call it a good game.

As Danny mentioned, some players cope better with the interruption by joking around or doing some breathing exercises or reviewing their stats or by moving around a bit (I do all four of these).

- Try to remember the sensation of what a good bowl actually felt like and try to replicate it. It shouldn't matter that there was a break in between.
- Use both verbal and physical cues to refocus your mind. Some stare at a particular spot on the green. Others use words like a mantra - I watched a documentary once years ago after being bowled out of a qualifying match to play in the main draw of the Australian Open one year. It was about a long

jumper who prior to the Olympics was struggling, wasn't favorite and no one gave him a chance. Only just managing to qualify for the final in the Olympics, he decided to use the two words "loose and languid" as his mantra to empathize how he wanted to feel on the day. He subsequently won not only gold, but also set an Olympic and World Record that stood for some years.

Lastly, I did read a study completed (possibly by the AIS, but for the life of me I can't find it anywhere now) in which they took a professional or semi-professional sports team and measured the effect that "holding it" had on these athletes. From memory it was something like water polo - a sport in which it was quite difficult to actually take a toilet break. What I do remember exactly was the study determined that cognitive decision making improved, but motor function decreased when you had to "hold it".

Basically that you make better decisions but your ability to execute is diminished.

(2) Hi all,

This theme started with taking breaks and how to refocus, before moving on to toilet breaks, following opponents into the toilet, shadow bowling, eating chips, electrolyte drinks, back to the toilet and finally how to make the most of the gap time between bowls. I especially enjoyed the emails and articles about how best to maximize the gap time between bowls, and Martin Crowe's analogy to life:

As I contemplate the meaning of much of my life, a life I now truly treasure, with dangers lurking, it is in this moment of nothing that I feel at peace. Awareness has taught me that previously I was always too quick to fill the gap with judgmental, premeditated masking and conditioning.

He was diagnosed with lymphoma in 2012, two years before writing this article, and died in 2016.

But let me go back to electrolyte drinks and hydration in bowls. I have added a few links for those interested.

https://journals.lww.com/acsm-msse/Fulltext/2007/02000/Exercise_and_Fluid_Replacement.22.aspx

<http://forms.acsm.org/TPC/PDFs/12%20Heiman.pdf>

Electrolyte solutions are essentially salt and sugar in water. Hydrolyte is used in diarrhoea and dehydration, and is essentially a cheap oral rehydration solution. Water is essential, but the gut will absorb water more quickly if there is the right concentration of salt (sodium) and sugar (glucose). This concentration is called isotonic. Anything stronger is hypertonic and weaker is hypotonic (closer to pure water). A number of other trace elements and minerals have been added to the popular sports drinks that are available.

There are a few take home messages for me.

- In bowls our sweat rate (litres / hour) would be at the low end of the scale. On the graph competition squash sweat rates are up to five times as much as sports like water polo and netball. Bowls would be significantly less. This means that our hydration and electrolyte requirements will be very different.
- We do need to be aware of our environment - temperature, humidity, length of play, clothing.
 - Our performance will diminish when we become only 2% dehydrated - especially our mental and cognitive performance.
 - Being well hydrated prior to exercise is essential - prehydrated. Drink slowly for several hours prior to a competition.
 - Subtle signs of dehydration such as thirst, dry mouth and concentrated urine occur once we have already become dehydrated. Signs such as dizziness, headache, vast heart rate and skin dryness happen when we are even more significantly dehydrated.
 - Drink periodically during the competition.
 - Electrolytes, especially sodium, should be replaced if losing a lot through sweating.

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- Sports drinks should be used for prolonged physical activity in hot weather.
- Alcohol can delay full rehydration.
- Older people are more susceptible to dehydration and have a "blunting" of the thirst response. Therefore it is even more important they stay ahead with regular fluids.
- Eating food promotes fluid intake and retention.
- Replacing fluids and electrolytes after competition is important.

My take on this is that we need to ensure we are well hydrated before any major competition, especially if it is a long day in hot conditions. We lose significant fluids overnight and probably wake up one litre down on where we should be. So volume loading with at least 500ml - 1000ml of water on waking is a good start.

Diet is important - especially the night before and a few hours prior to playing. If our diet is good we have all of the micronutrients and elements already on board.

Drinking fluids regularly through the day is essential - and try to drink enough so as not to be thirsty or have concentrated urine - because you already have mild dehydration at this point.

As bowls is a sport with limited aerobic stress our sweat losses will not be great (in most circumstances) so drinking sports drinks or electrolyte solutions is not necessary. Water is fine, or dilute juices or flavoured drinks if you want some sugar. Eating throughout the day will also help with carbohydrates for energy and sodium (salt) for sweat losses. If a sports drink is chosen then ensure water is also consumed.

A lot of this will depend on personal preferences and experience, as well as the environmental conditions we are playing in. Sports drinks have their place but be careful not to fall for the advertising, especially the generic hype about replacement of energy and electrolytes in sport. Playing two games of fours in a day where we may deliver 100 bowls during the day is very different to a 13 hour Ironman event in summer.

I hope this is helpful in considering how to prepare for some of the longer tournaments.

(3) In reply

I like to take a "two birds with one stone" approach to the bathroom break.

I have seen many players suffer from dry brain dehydration on the greens to the point of collapse after losing the ability to perform the simplest of tasks. But they were not dehydrated from lack of water as they were consuming a cup every second end to the point of bloating.

A U.S. doctor / lawn bowler explained to me the dehydration was a salt / electrolyte imbalance. Once that was fixed with a bag of potato chips (crisps), the urine followed the salt in relief.

Drinking too much water can also cause "stress incontinence" where players are clenching the pelvic floor (holding it in) to prevent leakage, which invariably fails from muscle fatigue. If you do not relieve the pressure, the distracting feeling will unsettle the feeling of calm and control we seek during good performances.

When keeping stats I like to review them (in game) without the pressure of my opponent expecting me to set the mat and keep the flow of the game going.

So the two birds are, plan the washroom break before the match starts, to line up with one of your review moments.

Behind closed doors you get double the relief with emptying the bladder and planning your assault.

(4) Hi all

A few years ago, but for quite a while, I was told by 'the bowling powers that be' that I was a better 4-bowl (singles / pairs) player than a 2-bowl player. (That is, until I started winning a lot of 2-bowl (team) competitions and performing consistently well in pennant). However, there may have been some truth in this. Using Danny's theory, I think I'm much more of an 'internal' rather than 'external' bowler i.e. I 'feel' the weight / shot required through my body, rather than use external cues such as markers on or around the greens.

One thing that I did struggle with, particularly in a 4's team format was the time between deliveries. Sometimes the time between the last bowl of one end and the first bowl of the next can be about 10 minutes,

especially on a quick green, or when there are other delays such as an umpire's measure or a team meeting. This was enough time to lose the 'feel' or 'touch'.

To address this, I was given advice to watch every bowl that was delivered on my rink in between my deliveries (our team and /or the opposition) and to 'shadow-bowl' as they were bowling - basically pretending I am the one delivering, not them. Sometimes I do this by just watching the bowler and keeping still, other times I'll physically act-out the delivery as they are bowling. Yes, I'm aware that this may make me look like a spud, but if it helps be successful then who cares! I forget who gave me this advice, but it's served me well ever since. I thought this may be useful to you in response to your toilet break question. And it may be useful to others regardless of the strength of your bladders!

(5) Hi

Good question. Normally I use the toilet break to break an opponent's rhythm, I hadn't given it a great deal of consideration if I actually had to go!

Even now, I use the toilet break as an excuse for my third to take over the end and become more engaged in the game. I leave him with the head, I go to the toilet and then I just sit and watch while he manages the head and decides what shot he is going to play. It provides a sense of trust and responsibility. We are all there for the same reason after all. My ego doesn't get a buzz by taking over, it gets a buzz when I see the opposition skip wondering why I'm just sitting there!

But that doesn't provide an answer to your question.

My first thought is 'why don't we practice it'. It might make for an interesting training scenario. I would be interested to see Lachs' training notes and diagrams for that one. I do like the option of using the stats to remind me what I am doing well or what I need to improve, and switch me back on when back on the green. Another thing to consider is a toilet break in singles (time wise) is no different from the amount of time in between

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bowls in a fours competition; how do we use those 10 minutes in between bowls to maintain our energy and focus, how do we continue to be engaged?

Do we relax and switch off for a short time, do we have a job in keeping our stats or recording what length we are playing, or do we have a process for switching back on, some deep breathing perhaps to relax, or some quick energetic breathing to raise the focus. It's worthwhile understanding your anxiety levels when you are playing your best and having a process for getting there. I know when I am playing at my best I am energized, continually moving, can't sit still for more than a few seconds, talking to the spectators and opposition, it might sound distracting to some but, for me, I can see that jack as big as a basketball.

Be interested to hear other thoughts

Lachlan Tighe 7/7/2022