

Improving Your Bowls

Love the comment I read which was find the sweet spot, then reach.

Sensing the sweet spot

Those of us with some exposure to golf or tennis know the reference to the term 'sweet spot'.

In bowls I wish to use the term in a different context of learning to improve using your senses. You deliver a bowl and probably as is typical, you turn around while the bowl is in progress down the green annoyed by that delivery.

Your first instinct is to look away, ignore it and pretend it didn't happen. This is not good, because, mistakes are our guideposts for improvement.

Apparently brain-scan studies reveal a vital instant, 0.25 seconds after a mistake is made, in which people do one of two things—they look hard at the mistake or they ignore it. People who pay deeper attention to an error learn significantly more than those who ignore it. Develop the habit as a serious bowler of attending to your errors right away. Don't wince, don't close your eyes; look straight at them and see what really happened and ask yourself what you can do next to improve. Take mistakes seriously, but never personally.

Sweet spot learning is about delivering that dud bowl and for the 13 seconds or more it takes to finish feeling what it was that caused that errant delivery, what part of the body was out of sync, this time!

Knowing what you sensed you can go now and start your pre-delivery routine and execute the delivery having fixed the error sensually and mentally in the time between deliveries. This method of analysis is a must in training as you can then take the method into the competition environment.

Take off your watch

Having coached a few national teams it fascinated me the cultures of some nations adhering to an approach for long sessions of training. Even when I convinced them to make sessions short, sharp and intensive, no sooner had I disappeared from the scene than long exhausting sessions became the norm. Every session should have a purpose, an Intensity, a sense

attitude, all about practicing habits

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of measurable achievement, and an element of fun. Long arduous sessions only satisfy that type of domineering coach. Forget it.

One learning step at a time

We all are familiar with the phrase, one step at a time. Taking that to bowls we can translate that a few ways. As a bowler with a coach, break your technique into bits so as to ensure you are efficient with each technical bit- feet, arm, body transfer- for each delivery type bit- draw, weighted, drive.

A goal each session can then be to improve one technical bit and one delivery bit which means a method of measure. Our club has a stock of template handouts at the club entrance for the keen bowler to take and score their delivery type. Over a season a player could compare where they started and how far they progress or regressed heaven help us!

Bowlers have a view that regular practice is the essence of their improvement.

The regular practice provides nothing more than activity, maybe maintenance of current skill level. A measured form of purposeful training of skills is an accomplishment of improvement.

On another topic of small bits I refer to time.

Practice is a habit. Practicing daily for a short time is a skill and a habit and a reflection of an attitude of wanting to be better. Practicing daily reinforces your learning and the habit of application is inherent, automatic. Finding that time daily requires planning, another skill you bring in to your developing game of bowls.

Struggle, embrace it, accept it

Our 2018 New year session at Deer Park with serious bowlers was impressive because you could hear a pin drop the players were so immersed in the measurable training activity. It was as if the brain was hurting the effort was so intense.

Struggle is part of competition. Struggle to learn a higher level of skill is a barrier to contend with, win and transfer (the mindset) into bowls competition.

Struggle stretches you and the more you are stretched the better bowler you most probably are.

So why not accept it; rewards are fulfilling.

Drills & Games sense

Bowlers hate drills.

The drills I have witnessed set up by coaches are boring and similar. Cones to deliver into, up one end back the other. Drills are dreary. No they need not be.

Coaches conducting the sessions are dreary, that's a bit harsh. Let's say coaches are conditioned to do what they were shown at accreditation courses.

OK, coaches be imaginative. Set up drills that highlight technical competency, are challenging, that have a measure of performance, have a competitive element, have a team element, have a relevance to the game. Just here I have given six aspects or purposes. Yeah good on ya for all that advice on the six aspects of the drill says your reading this. No, do not read this as one drill doing all this. It can be the one drill, but over the session we use that drill to meet each aspect one segment at a time. Hence if the drill goes an hour, then each aspect will be the focus for ten minutes, changing the aspect every ten minutes.

Solitary practice is sensible

Apparently world class performers spend five times more time practicing alone than we normal sporting practitioners. Gee, in bowls you practice alone and you are deemed an outsider, arrogant (quote here Harrison 1936 bowls book).

Hello bowlers, wake up!

On my website I have detailed six (6) 90 minute training sessions for solitary training with specific purposes knowing elite bowlers will have the motivation and discipline to do the grind yet the good and ordinary bowler expects the same reward.

Only the elite get rewarded, duly so.

Think in images

I use word associations a lot to assist bowlers get a feel for what we are trying to do together. Hence caterpillar for a series of bowls in a row; collect the cheque for an outstretched hand as part of follow through; mat length as an expression of weight as we are standing on it and can cast our eyes down to see the exact distance of a mat. I use word associations

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because it is a sensory impression to be able to connect onto when in a game.

Shrink the space

I encourage imagination in our training; experimentation encourages wider experience. The green is traditionally used in rink system for training. I use the green, from ditch to ditch, as an overall arena to conduct training with numerous drills going concurrently. Of late I am using the rink line as a tool or cue to demonstrate how to develop and gain effective jack throws, draw bowling weight (variation), and, drive competence. Other field sports shrink the space at training to hone set skills, we can do likewise for bowlers to develop technical skill, to even reinforce certain skills.

X marks the spot when you get it right

I read where practice starts when you get it right.
How interesting!

Nearly every bowler I come across has no idea what it is they do in their delivery when their bowl finishes spot on. I will ask them what they did and few seem to know. You bowl that ripper in training, freeze. Right there. Rewind the tape, now. Replay the tape by talking through the entire segment- pre-delivery, body posture, body movements, follow through- knowing it you have a better chance of replicating it, caterpillar measure. You need to memorize the sensations of body, mind that caused that level of excellence, that X marks the spot. When this is on you are in automatic mode.

Now training can start.

Learn to exaggerate

Bowlers always want to get it perfect the first time, and often with no expenditure of energy, read training. What I like to do is get them to feel the contrast to then be able to come back to the zone in question. Example: a bowler constantly playing a big metre over the zone, have them deliberately draw to a big metre short to experience the contrast (in technique and sensory awareness). Similar example of a bowler frequently delivering

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narrow, get them to go wide by well over a metre from the zone to feel what is required to move away from the narrowness.

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