

Singles: identifying and coping with competition pressure,

As you read this 2017, the elite male and female bowlers within Australia were either vying to win the finals for the Bowls Victoria state titles in November, and, ten players from every bowls nation recently represented their country in the world titles in New Zealand over November/December.

So, we have situations where elite players were / are focusing their aims as singles players or as team members, which I shall detail in the next article. They will experience a sense of hesitation and uncertainty if only because of the wait and the delay in not knowing how they will go on the day, and to an extent the lengthy period of the championship event. Bit like us at any level.

So, what can these representative bowlers expect as support, guidance and training from a coach, say, if they were to be coached by you. Well here is how I might prime and talk to the players for the games ahead, in this column focus for the singles events. I anticipate scenarios that create doubt, and give them prompts to consider as thinking caps to overcome the doubt.

Scenario: Singles competition

You draw a hot shot name bowler(s) in the next round.

As bowlers think:

- This is a challenge, I love challenges.
- I have devised a plan to counter him / her.
- No one is invincible.
- Concentrate on the process for the entire game.
- Mistakes are going to occur, however, minimise dropping multiples (scores).

Today, you find you are very lethargic.

Think:

- I control this mood.
- Visualise the game.
- Hey, this is important being here.
- Be ready, warm up mentally and physically.

Website menu: mental skill

You go into the next round having bowled a blinder.

Think:

- I am really enjoying the skill level I am showing.
- Continue that vein, don't accept a drop in standard.
- Set a goal and segment again for the next game.
- But don't expect the standard to be at an exceptional level all day.

You play the perfect bowl to score, now you prepare to bowl again.

Think:

- Prove it was no fluke, 'caterpillar' delivery.
- Finish the job.
- Balance, calm skillful.
- Been there, done this, piece of cake.

Ensure the bowler knows level(s) of arousal is normal.

Think:

- It is natural to be nervous / aroused.
- Accept those levels and focus on a segment of performance at a time.
- Relaxation tools.

As the coach, control your anxiety with the player.

If in attendance at the event, think:

- What is expected of me as coach in this emotional competitive situation?
- How to ensure others, selectors / team managers, are aware of their nervous energy?
- Accept comments as constructive.
- Plan adequately for contingencies so as not to be distracted from your role on the day.

The player trains poorly the day before round one and then is outclassed day one of event.

Reaction:

- What is the desired level of training to describe that session as poor?
- What discussion should occur with the player to prime him / her for these matches?
- What is the player's view, response?
- What action occurs after the (lost) match to raise their performance level for next round?

Website menu: mental skill

In debrief to the player, ..this is the best game of bowls I have watched you play.

Reaction between you and the player:

- Beyond the score or the closeness of the contest, what was it that made it the best game?
- What was the content of the post game analysis of this best game?
- How will the best game model then transfer into future training sessions / rounds / events?

If the singles opponent simply outclasses us we should ensure the player notes the improvement necessary for them to succeed in future rounds of the event.

Reaction:

- What is the level of improvement necessary to succeed?
- Did the player improve though they lost, and how, and why?

As coaches we need to encourage all bowlers, elite or otherwise, to prepare for all scenarios that will occur in competition, but especially the championships / finals competition pressure. We have to condition the bowler through relevant training to respond immediately in a positive way whenever confronted by pressure in competition. Pressure is an occupational hazard.

Coaches need to develop a mood or environment to enable bowlers to play at their peak. That requires bowlers to understand and manage their own arousal level. As coach, you could be gauging the level for the player during the season, so as to know the levels of the player come the preparation period on the morning of the big day.

Bowls performance is like an investment portfolio...

It has highs / lows you need to ride out,
You need to have a solid foundation before speculating,
If you fail to plan you, deadset, plan to fail,
So set the goals, and monitor the goals.

Lachlan Tighe, 2017