

Tiger Tales

Bowls in Focus column

(February 12, 2011 submission deadline)

Self Belief

I read an article recently on cricket written by a former Test cricket player in which he tried to explain the mindset of the fragile out of form player trying desperately to retain their test position or in our elite bowls levels, their squad berth.

The thrust of the article applies to all of us in bowls from the Joe Bloggs at Division ten up to Mark Jacobsen our Aussie squad member who missed a spot at Delhi 2010 Games. Mark and Karen both faced that very situation facing the cricketers.

People like me (as a coach) say competition for places is a good thing. To the extent with the Malaysian players I said they only knew they were in the team when they were sitting on the plane heading to the Games.

Every bowler wants security in the team selection. Watch with interest the people activity around your club selection board during the week. Gee, feel for the 2010 Australian squad post India as a result of no gold medals. Do they know their fate yet? You as a bowler played a bad game at pennant, now you are sweating on selection for next weeks teams.

Unless of course you are a selector (silly me)!

When any sportsperson, paid or amateur, in whatever sport is faced with uncertainty in future team selection, there is perceived, and real, pressure. The mind no doubt is now filled with doubt, second guessing, what if's!!! Self belief suffers.

Maybe we are in teams facing pennant finals wondering if our recent poor performance is going to cause our demise, demotion, doom as a member of that finals side.

Not surprisingly many a bowler will go overboard in their analysis of the what's/ maybes.

Our bowls system tragically is such a recreational sport approach, from club to national level, that the mere idea of selectors alerting players of the security of their place in the future side, and the necessary follow on to be referred to the relevant coach for skill reinforcement is a mystery, out of this world concept. Pity players are not asked about it.

We do play competitive sport, don't we?

In many other sports the player in question goes off and increases their physical work rate as a solution. In bowls we don't, we increase our complaint rate.

Methinks increasing the work rate is not necessarily the answer as the issue to me appears above the shoulders, and, the mental skills (of composure, positivity) combined with team and tactical support in training are the tools needed in equal measure.

Self belief is not 'verbal barrage'. It is about reinforcing good things you do, hear, say, and train at to know it exists. And do it with other bowlers who reinforce the positives. Knowing you are on track in itself is strong self belief. Results invariably follow.

Every week at some pennant venue a 'team leader/ manager' will do a rah rah talk to the troops that tends to be innocuous crap, often telling the do's and don'ts and totally negating the merit of a team talk, meeting. Self belief is within. No words from outside will enter if you are not open to the window of self belief. If the belief is only half open,

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those words from the team leader that contain the negatives, the doubts, will be as a seed sown to those of you who have any self doubt.

As Paul Keating exclaimed....it is for the true believers.

True believers know what works as they have recorded, recalled, revisited, rehearsed that successful concept in training and maybe in writing. Sure these believers struggle too, who does'nt? They know how to bounce back.

Excuses and justifications tend to follow our bad game of bowls. Analysis and lessons for future preparation and improved performances are never evident to me at club level pennant bowls. And maybe such analysis only occasionally even at elite level bowls. Except the champions!

A characteristic common to the very best bowlers around, today or yesterday, and male or female, was that degree of self confidence, self belief. Being able to believe you have the ability to be successful at your level of bowls competition.

Bit like coaching too. Utter self belief in yourself, your approach, your system to ensure those bowlers in your care, or squad, know they are working with someone of like mind. A true believer.

Lachlan Tighe.