

## **Soft eyes for great weight**

I have fostered the notion of sensory awareness, sensory skill for many years. I found an assortment of writings from me and squad members going back to 2020 when all were in lockdown.

Those views, comments retain their pertinence today.

So in 2007 I gave away my computerised video analysis and computer (which we had used the preceding years for international success) and commenced coaching bowlers to be in touch with their body in delivering bowls.

A challenge, to them not me.

And I lost a few players in this introduction.

My book, my website, my YouTube videos all refer to sensory awareness, sensory skill.

What I am striving to do is coach players with emphasis on a sensory feel in their delivery. Which has included reference and application to soft eyes / soft hands.

World famous bowler David Bryant talks about affixing the eyes to a point and not letting them stray. I think he said his eyes were “riveted”.

Pat in our squad said he read some interesting material on quiet eyes - basketball players making more free throws if their eyes stay on a fixed point - any fixed point for that matter. Same for a golfer making putts - keep the eyes on a constant point.

Pat dedicates 15 minutes of each training session now to rolling bowls over a target five metres from the mat. The target gives my eyes something to focus on. When I remove the targets for the rest of the session I can still visualize them. I think this is going to improve my effectiveness in hitting my line. Will keep you posted.

Well in 2022 he has gone and won the Canadian national singles title AND the Canadian national fours championship.

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Danny shared his idea on sensory coaching from his years of imaginative coaching.

Regarding improving your weight control on slower greens, there are a number of physical things we can do (as mentioned by David Bryant), which individually or combined all help in reaching on slower speed greens, however when trying to improve weight control I encourage players to do something different.

I ask them to have a very firm idea of where they want their bowl to finish, then I get them to line up on the mat, and then, just before delivering your bowl, you shut your eyes (and keep them shut) and bowl.

With your eyes shut focus on the 'feel' or rhythm in your body.

Still with your eyes shut, turn and face away from your bowl travelling along the green. Once you believe your bowl has come to a stop, turn around and estimate how far away from your target your bowl ended up.

Don't worry about the line, in this exercise it's all about the weight. After you have estimated the distance your first bowl finished from the jack, adjust the 'feel' or rhythm you remembered to throw the next bowl harder or softer (as required). Your body will automatically take a bigger backswing, or a longer step without you having to think about it. This exercise can be a bit daunting at first, but it can be of real value in helping give you better weight control. Give it a try. Twenty or 30 minutes, best done initially with no one watching. For some it doesn't work, but for others a real eye opener.

Danny (quoting below) again on a session he ran for Alison with me assisting, observing more likely:

Soft eyes and engaging the whole of your body in the delivery

On this particular day, Alison was struggling with rolling a jack, with any accuracy, on a medium to long end on a slow (for Australia) green. I picked up a jack and rolled it, immediately followed by rolling a bowl (while the jack was still in motion) with the same amount of effort, and the bowl and jack ended up right next to each other. What I was trying to demonstrate was the relationship between the bowl and the jack and that led to a discussion on how Alison controls her weight. She said she 'feels' the weight in her hand. I explained that on this day, on this green, she needs to move her focus to her shoulder. For a slower green more body needs to be engaged in the process (We need to use the bigger muscle groups.), therefore

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the focus needs to change according to the conditions, and it worked. This was the day Alison wrote the email about crying at training. Alison had reconnected with her body and had tears rolling down her face with joy.

Being fellas, Lachie and I weren't quite sure what to do!!! The joys of coaching! So the lesson was 'if you are **internally focussed** what part of your body do you concentrate on?'

All of your body is used for every delivery, it's just we need to focus on different parts depending on the conditions.

Imagine if you only wanted to push your bowl one metre, you only need to feel the bowl fall out of your hand. Now imagine doing that with any consistency when focussing on your hand and trying to deliver the same bowl 35 metres on a 10 second green. It's not going to work. That's when we need to employ the rest of our body. (Watch Alex Marshall delivery on a slow green, all body weight and timing.)

We are all different, but for most it would be something like this:

17 seconds and above - HAND,

15-16 seconds - HAND and FOREARM

13-14 seconds - SHOULDER, TIMING

12 and below - LEGS, BACK, SHOULDERS, ARM, TIMING

The second part of the exercise is about using 'soft' eyes to allow yourself to be able to 'look' at the line, while concentrating on the weight. We don't need to stare at a spot or a line on the green, we only need to 'gaze' at it.

If we concentrate so hard on a spot we don't have much capacity left to concentrate on the weight required. If we simply allow our eyes to do their job we can hit that line more often than not, while still being able to concentrate on how hard (or soft) to throw the next bowl. Remember when Jeremy Henry used to stare at the bowl just before delivery, We asked him one day 'why?'" He said he was deciding how hard to throw it!

It's the old 'look at the line, feel the weight'.

**Lachlan Tighe, October, 2022.**