

Language Amazes

VERBAL LANGUAGE

Words, the ultimate performance enhancing drug.

When I listen to bowlers anywhere, I am astounded by the parrot fashion of bowlers using language which is inane, ill informed, emotional, vague, deflating, dumb jargon.

And as we have competition pennant bowls in our home state, I witness this stupidity every damn week. Woe is me around such self defeating stuff.

Maddening bowlers, many of whom are regarded as good bowlers, with their obvious misuse of language.

And this applies to both competition pennant and club bowls practice where we should be reinforcing good habits. But this for example is what I heard last week from four separate rinks:

Calling the (losing) score rather than providing direction for the player delivery;

Telling all within earshot that their bowl was a lousy delivery;

Commentating, rather than analyzing the practice game;

A singles contest with one player constantly rebuking his performance and feeding the opponent with confidence by giving compliment for their delivery;

That stupid statement of...be positive (for me I am already);

Saying what you want from a player, then instantly saying what to be wary of;

Get stuck in (what, to fight);

Always (an absolute);

Never (another absolute);

Try to get shot ought to be phrased...will get shot;

Don't be short must be removed altogether and phrased...you can do this;

What if I'm heavy (anxiety abounds) to be phrased...choose the weight;

Is their bowl a danger with my shot (anxiety again) phrased...you can do this;

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I can't see that shot...you will be contributing with this delivery (inference in this example is that the player will not be shot bowl which he/she wants rather than the team view).

There are no absolutes in sport, the language makes it so.

For example, related to a bowls attitude with someone losing confidence saying they are..never getting it ...which could be switched to...not getting it this time.

See the game of bowls as a puzzle requiring decisions.

For coaches we need to foster initiative to make decisions then debrief (the experience) on the efficacy of that chosen decision, that choice today.

Compare it to alternatives, options.

Changing the language from absolutes to a continuum of effectiveness means we might inspire confidence in players for them to take more responsibility for their decisions and for them to feel more willing to use their initiative (again and again).

We use words as language.

It is not what is said but the way you say it that makes impact.

A bloke named Mehrabian in his research found:

7% of communication is in words.

55% of communication is body language.

38% of communication is in the voice tone.

I am sure you have heard the phrase 'self talk' which simply is you talking to you, a way of rehearsing what you hope to execute in a bowls delivery.

The way I do this with players at training is for them to tell me precisely what they are doing with the bowl about to be delivered.

Someone may say draw shot. Well if no other bowl has been delivered I say why not state you are going to...draw a resting toucher. Raises intensity, specifies a target, is so precise.

Sometimes a player will say ...I am going to try... and I stop them there to delete the possible, the inferred anxiety in the wording and now ask for a confident positive phrase, e.g....I am going to.... (draw resting toucher)

It is our use of language that enables us to frame how we feel about pressure: it is conveyed in the language, the words used, the tone.

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We can move from a state of anxiety to one of excitement simply in the use of language. If not excitement then at least challenge.

Used well, the language can alter our perception so that we feel the words are fuel for a greater level of performance. It is language that can aid in a better level of self-esteem, more confidence in the (delivery) execution of our task set in bowls.

This heightened performance level may well be due to the language on offer in the field where it is all four- powerful, positive, productive & personal.

e.g. Harry, when you deliver this bowl to here you will have our team four shots up, go for it mate!

That use of language in recognizing what we do well and setting our approach on how to do well through our affirmations, those of our team leaders / skips, we give and get for ourselves, that give the platform to benefit for our success, individually and as the team in bowls.

Positive people are amazing, and amazing to be around, and, ooze confidence due to their success.

BODY LANGUAGE

Passive people are passengers.

Sometimes with bowlers I feel like asking them ...is anyone home inside there (body)?

The posture you display, which everyone can see on show in public, is so, so vital. A person who displays stature in their posture is saying to us the team, to our opponents, well, here I am and I am in command here and you better know it.

Roger the dodger (Federer in case I had anyone unaware) walks the talk because as I see it he lets his body do the talking and we understand the language we see.

I am not suggesting those brash whackers we know of in bowls, who though good bowlers, as skips are loud mouth jobs. I allude more to Roger Federer who simply oozes control, nay command of himself, the opposition, the elements, the event, anyone with eyes and ears to observe.

COACHING LANGUAGE

For some coaches they are our worst offenders in poor use of language, be it verbal or body type language.

Language as a tool, a skill, an asset, is one we coaches (and also you selectors) in bowls seem not to sell enough as a message.

As coach I worked to alter the term pressure to challenge as my motto with Safuan (Said) when he won the world bowls titles.

Our seminar on bowls recently had included a session on the need for all us coaches in attendance to intrude into negative behaviour more so at training so as to eliminate it in competition.

Disappointedly far too many of the seminar attendees when in the practical session were the worst culprits, or offenders as I said just above, of displays of negative behavior either in the verbal or body languages. Heaven help we bowlers getting guidance on modes of better behaviour.

What type or style of language should be directed to the players?

It is good use of language that enables us to reframe how we feel about pressure. It is language that allows us to effect the change from anxiety to excitement, or challenge, so that we can begin to perceive feelings as high-octane fuel for a great performance.

It is language that can boost our self-esteem and raise our confidence. It is language too, in its careless and thoughtless application, that can sadly inhibit and destroy these qualities.

So it is through the use of language, of recognising what we do well and setting our approach in how to do well through the affirmations that we players (include us coaches here) can give ourselves the platform to benefit.

How many players, coaches, and selectors in bowls need to know and heed this statement on language?

The answer is everyone.

Lachlan Tighe, 2017